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**“TO NURTURE SOMETHING THAT NURTURES YOU”: CARE,
CREATIVITY, CLASS, AND THE PRODUCTION OF URBAN
ENVIRONMENTS IN DEINDUSTRIAL MICHIGAN**

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“TO NURTURE SOMETHING THAT NURTURES YOU”: CARE, CREATIVITY, CLASS,
AND THE PRODUCTION OF URBAN ENVIRONMENTS IN DEINDUSTRIAL MICHIGAN

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

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Lexington, Kentucky

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

“TO NURTURE SOMETHING THAT NURTURES YOU”: CARE, CREATIVITY, CLASS, AND THE PRODUCTION OF URBAN ENVIRONMENTS IN DEINDUSTRIAL MICHIGAN

In this dissertation I investigate how gardeners and beekeepers in a small, deindustrial city in Michigan used their activities to produce their environments. Drawing on fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork, I consider what *kind of labor* gardening is. For residents of Elmwood, gardening was a way to care for households, communities, and ecosystems. Furthermore, this care was performed through a type of creative, material labor that served to address forms of alienation experienced by these individuals. While all sorts of Elmwoodites gardened, they did so in ways that were specific to their experiences of race and class. These experiences, in turn, were directly shaped by Elmwood’s particular history. Legacies of racial tolerance and discrimination, industrialization and the resulting in-migration of rural Southerners, and the differentiated impacts of deindustrialization have all contributed to the production of social and spatial inequalities based on differences of class and race. I thus examine the ways race- and class-based inequalities shape the *kinds of environments* gardeners produced through their caring, creative labor. Employing the lenses of social reproduction and environmental gentrification, I discuss the ways gardeners worked to address sociospatial inequalities, as well as they ways their practices maintained them. I conclude that while ongoing racial inequalities and processes of class formation present challenges to gardeners’ desires to produce nurturing multispecies environments, these desires also motivated gardeners to engage with the ways they were entangled with other human and nonhuman beings, engagements that present possibilities for producing more socially equitable and ecologically urban environments.

KEYWORDS: Gardening, Care, Reconnection, Class, Urban Space, Urban Environments

Megan L. Maurer

June 29, 2017

“TO NURTURE SOMETHING THAT NURTURES YOU”: CARE, CREATIVITY, CLASS,
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Chapter 1: Producing Environments in a Time of Socioecological Precarity

Prior to my fieldwork, I had never been a community gardener. Through previous experience as a youth garden programming coordinator I had helped young people participate in community gardening, but had never actually done the thing myself. But in the winter of 2014, having begun fieldwork the previous fall, I found myself living in a third-floor apartment in downtown Elmwood,¹ above a restaurant, with no conceivable gardening space of my own. So, I (and my husband) joined the Central Elmwood Community Garden, located about a half mile away. I contacted the steward, whom I knew through my research, filled out an application, paid our plot fee, and jumped right in. If the world of community gardeners, and urban vegetable gardeners more generally, had always been familiar to me, actually participating in a community garden brought an unanticipated level of understanding about the kinds of relationships in which these gardeners participated. On a day to day basis, being a community gardener required actually being in the community garden, which itself required walking the half-mile across town to spend thirty to sixty minutes laboring in our plots several days a week. Our garden was located on a vacant lot in the Senate Hill neighborhood, the most racially and socioeconomically diverse neighborhood in the city. It fronted the street and was bordered on one side by colorfully painted and impressively landscaped homes, and on the other side by a more ramshackle house rented out to a multigenerational family. Often we were alone in the garden, but never unseen. Casual comments and chance encounters with passersby, neighbors, and on occasion, fellow gardeners, grew as much as our beans, tomatillos, and kale. Though I had often heard people speak of it, I came to understand that there was a relational nature to community gardening, and as I later learned, home-based urban vegetable gardening as well. It was an activity characterized by its physicality, both in terms of material labor and actual presence in urban space, that provoked one into engaging, however tepidly, with other human and nonhuman beings.

¹ This and all other names referring to places and people have been changed to protect the privacy of research participants.

By the end of the growing season (roughly May–October in Michigan) our sixty-four square feet of garden had yielded a significant amount of produce. Most of it had been eaten or shared with friends, but some left Michigan with us as frozen beans, arugula pesto, and jars of salsa verde. Our pole beans were particularly bountiful, and by September my husband and I were officially overwhelmed. I had befriended several neighborhood children by teaching them to weed and harvest, and gave them *carte blanche* to harvest as many beans as they liked. Not long after this, I received a call from the garden steward, Kelly, who wanted me to know she had caught the neighbor children picking in my garden. She assured me she had reprimanded them appropriately, before I could ask if they had been picking beans. “Yes,” she replied, it had been just the beans. I laughed, explaining I had given them permission to harvest beans. Kelly chuckled at the misunderstanding, and the next time I saw the children in question, I explained the mix-up and they went back to free-ranging on my pole beans. This experience, and many other small exchanges like it, such as when Kelly and another gardener taught me about the wonders of ground cherries during a group workday and we joked about how we might market them to the upscale foodie audience in one of the more affluent cities nearby, made me feel part of a community. Gardening also helped me relieve my own fieldwork stress through vigorous weeding, and I felt a sense of pride in being part of a recognized asset to the city. By the end of the growing season it was clear to me that gardening yielded much more than produce.

My experiences echoed those of the community and home gardeners that I spoke with over fourteen months of fieldwork. Why do you garden? What are the benefits? What do you get out of it? I asked people like Lara, who was not a community gardener, but cultivated an extensive vegetable garden in both her front and back yards. A slight Latina woman, living in one of the city’s more socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods, Lara was also very interested in creating relationships among her neighbors. Her answer to my questions was fairly representative:

I could go on forever about how much I get out of gardening. It’s about my health and my place in nature. It feels right to be out in the sun, with

my hands in the dirt. I feel healthier. I could weed forever. It makes me calmer and more present. When I garden, I feel happier and wiser. And it's nice to be in a beautiful space that is peaceful despite all its chaos.

Later in her interview, Lara described how she wanted to put a little bench in the front of her garden, by the sidewalk, so neighbors could sit and enjoy the peaceful beauty too, and maybe become friends in the process.

What emerged from my laboring alongside and interviewing both home and community gardeners was an understanding that gardening was both a type of labor and a way of cultivating relationships. As Lara's words suggest though, it was not just any kind of labor. It was work that brought one into physical contact with nature and required one to directly engage in the process of making material sustenance for the self and both human and nonhuman others—in Lara's case, insects; she was currently trying to cultivate a population of beneficial insects, such as pollinating insects and those that ate plant pests, in her organic garden.² In other words, it was a kind of creative, material labor. Moreover, this labor, and the relationships it nourished, were put to particular ends, among them, care for others. Through gardening Elmwoodites pursued the mutual well-being of themselves, their households, their communities, and their ecosystems. People from all different walks of life, across the spectrum of race- and class-based differences, gardened in Elmwood, but many shared a similar core narrative: a desire to create environments and ways of living that made life in the city better for themselves and for other human and nonhuman beings.

Yet in people's narratives of why they gardened and how it benefited them I also heard stories of lives with little opportunity for care and creativity. Elmwood is located in southeastern Michigan, in a part of the US popularly called the "Rust Belt." Once a booming industrial town,

²By "nonhuman" I refer to the range of other living beings that inhabit the Earth, from plants and nonhuman animals to fungi and bacteria. While I intellectually sympathize with the articulation of these beings (and humans' necessary interrelatedness with them) as the "more-than-human," I opt to use the term nonhuman to represent the ways that most people in Elmwood understood these beings and their relationship to them (Haraway 2008; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010; Tsing 2015; Whatmore 2002).

Elmwood today is decidedly deindustrial. Automobile manufacturing is no longer the economic base of the city, and no comparable employer has emerged to take its place, leaving residents unqualified for the white-collar work available in neighboring cities to get-by on poorly remunerated service sector jobs. Charles, a young man in his twenties with a high school education, struggled to find time to garden, a childhood hobby, as he hopped from retail job to retail job trying to find something that offered both reasonable hours and adequate compensation. Those able to find jobs in sectors like information technology and health care faced grinding commutes on traffic jammed roads, and while benefiting from greater economic security, they also told stories of stultification brought on by the cultural pressure to consume more. In a landscape dotted with closed down factories, vacant city lots, empty storefronts, and foreclosed homes, residents told me of wage labor jobs that brought little satisfaction beyond a paycheck, relentless consumerism, potholes, litter, anomie. Bill, an artist by trade, worked retail, and spoke about how his creativity was stymied by this economically necessary labor and his discouragement at everyday passing by a vacant strip mall and factory as he left his neighborhood to commute to work. For Bill and others like him, gardening was an antidote, a way to reconnect to “the basics of life”—whether that was our reliance on food grown from the earth or realizing our place within global ecosystems—and engage in creative, material labor. For Charles and those with experiences similar to his, gardening was also a way to hold on to family traditions and experience a sense of stability amidst economic precarity. Across such differences, gardening allowed people like Bill and Charles to care for themselves and their households, while simultaneously caring for their communities and for ecosystems perceived to be threatened by things like global warming and rising rates of socioeconomic inequality.

The interrelated problems of global climate change and inequalities based on differences of race and class are increasingly provoking inquiry from anthropologists, who ask how can we live more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable lives amidst increasing socioeconomic

and ecological precarity (c.f. Tsing 2015)?³ Such questions are important and growing ever more immediate as climate change continues with seemingly few adequate policy responses and its impacts disproportionately affect poor and working peoples, people of color, and Third World peoples—those with the least amount of responsibility for global atmospheric carbon levels and the least means to combat the ecological, economic, and social effects of global warming, such as losses of homes and livelihoods (Graddy-Lovelace et al. 2016; Whittington 2016). Meanwhile, both scholars and environmental activists wonder what it will take for human beings, particularly in the developed world, to respond to these existential threats, citing everything from the sheer expanse of the ecological problem to the embeddedness of modernist, “techno-fixes” in our ecological thinking (Alaimo 2016; Isenhour 2016; Morton 2013)

Responses to climate change by the public and policy-makers have focused on manipulating competitive markets and rational self-interest to favor ecologically sustainable practices, assuming that ordinary people will not engage in such practices unless it is of immediate economic benefit. Ethnographers, however, have drawn attention to the ways people do engage in ecologically sustainable practices, even without the motivation of material gain, on the basis of moral and other non-economistic logics. Scholars of the moral economy, from Mauss (1990) to Graeber (2011) have elaborated the ways people all around the world make decisions

³ By precarity I mean to reference the ways in which the workings of deindustrialization, global neoliberal capitalism, and climate change have rendered the experience of socioeconomic relations and environments more precarious for Elmwoodites. That is, the networks of social, economic, and ecological relations on which people rely seemed to them increasingly tenuous and at risk of changing for the worse. This manifest in Elmwoodites’ pronounced concerns about downward class mobility—that if they did not attract the right kinds of entrepreneurial, creative class people and businesses the city, and by extension its residents, would be destitute—and anxieties about climate change—articulated in such concerns as the reliability of industrialized food systems or conflicts over Michigan’s reserves of freshwater. While it is significant for my analysis of gardening as a form of care that these experiences of precarity are, as Butler (2004) argues, predicated on the recognition of social and ecological interdependence, this recognition of interdependence and the efforts to care for self and others it compels also intensified the demands placed on individuals to perform the work of social reproduction (e.g. providing for the material needs of the jobless, protecting the integrity of food production and distribution systems) (Berlant 2011; Han 2012; Meehan and Strauss 2015). Thus in Elmwood, as elsewhere, socioeconomic and ecological precarity are experienced through both the tenuousness of socioeconomic and ecological relations and the strain placed on individuals’ and collectivities’ capacities to do the work of maintaining these relations.

based on their desires for a fulfilling life and their sense of what is morally and ethically correct behavior. From participation in the intricate exchange networks of the *kula* (Malinowski 1961) to middle-class Swedes' consumption choices (Isenhour 2010), these decisions are made regardless of how they impact material well-being. Indeed, while the urban vegetable gardeners and beekeepers I conducted research with in Elmwood were interested in thrifty means of acquiring healthy and sustainable food for themselves and their families, they were just as interested in supporting the mutual flourishing of their communities and ecosystems, and actively labored toward this goal. Many reported that when the time spent on gardening was factored in, it was at best a wash in terms of material expense, but they continued to garden because of the personal and ethical satisfaction it gave them. In this dissertation, I examine these aspects of gardening and beekeeping, beginning with an investigation of the ways Elmwood's gardeners and beekeepers enact care. I then move to consider the ways these Elmwoodites' care work is also an engagement in creative material labor, and how both care and creativity are brought together in the doing of gardening to become part of these individuals' efforts to nourish more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable forms of urban life.

One of the ways gardeners and beekeepers in Elmwood went about cultivating more sustainable urban environments was through pollinator-friendly gardens. These gardens used a variety of herbs and native flowering species to provide habitat and nourishment for pollinating species like birds, butterflies, and honeybees. While ecologically important, these gardens were not aesthetically pleasing to everyone, often featuring very tall (>4ft) plants in less than orderly layouts. These acts of care for nonhuman beings—and for humans, given the important role of pollinating insects in the production of food—were jarring in middle-class neighborhoods where grass lawns and neat landscaping were *de rigueur*. In working class and African-American majority neighborhoods, where vacant homes and untended lawns were common, such gardens were unthinkable for residents, far too close in appearance to the overgrown lawns of abandoned homes used to index these communities as struggling and undesirable places to live.

As this example shows, the use of gardening as a form of creative, multispecies care work cannot be disentangled from the social and spatial contexts in which it occurs, as different kinds of land use, and particularly the appearance of different kinds of land dis/use, carried class meanings that mattered to a wide-range of Elmwoodites. While Elmwoodites across the spectrum of race- and class-based differences gardened, the ways they gardened were shaped by, and shaped, inequalities based on these differences. Thus, in this dissertation, while I investigate the ways Elmwoodites used gardening and beekeeping to cultivate ways of urban living that nourished mutual well-being among humans and nonhumans alike, I do so while attending to the ways these creative, caring practices are shaped by social and spatial inequality in the city, particularly inequalities based on differences of class. I compare the ways gardeners engaged in the work of social reproduction of the environment across differences of race and class, and examine how ecologically-conscious forms of gardening, like pollinator-friendly gardens, came to be favored by white, middle-class gardeners and the ways this association intersected with urban planning and development policy priorities in the city to generate a kind of environmental gentrification.

In this introductory chapter I begin by positioning my research on the ways Elmwoodites enact care and creativity through gardening and beekeeping in relation to the scholarly work on the anthropology of space and place. Building on the core insight of this literature—that social relations and space are co-constituted—I also draw on the recent multispecies turn in anthropology and geographer Cindi Katz’s idea of the social reproduction of the environment (2004) to frame key questions about how Elmwoodites use gardening to produce urban environments and what kinds of social relations these environments in turn engender.

In framing the ways gardeners create particular kinds of environments as a form of social reproduction that engages the city’s nonhuman, as well as human, residents, I seek to draw attention to the ways gardening is for many Elmwoodites a form of care and creative, material labor. I go on to consider gardening with respect to anthropological and feminist literatures that

posit a relational understanding of care predicated on the desire for mutual well-being, building on the recent work of anthropologists like Aulino (2016), who urges researchers to consider just what exactly constitutes care in varying contexts, and Hustak and Myers (2012), who argue ethnographers ought to consider the ways nonhuman beings are participants in humans' affective relationships to the world. I then place gardening within the political-economic and ethnographic context of Elmwood in order to establish the ways this activity represents a form of creative, material labor for gardeners, one that enables them to address various experiences of alienation in their day-to-day lives while also caring for themselves and others.

These discussions of care and creative, material labor are followed by a more detailed consideration of social reproduction. In particular, I elaborate further on the concept of social reproduction of the environment as posited by Katz with respect to the literature on social reproduction. I then turn to review the anthropological literature on processes of class formation in order to present the understanding of class employed in this dissertation and to suggest the ways gardening was involved in class-making processes? in Elmwood. I conclude my overview of this dissertation's conceptual framework by discussing the contributions of this study to the body of work on alternative agrifood practices.

Producing Urban Environments

Gardens are tangible places. They and their gardeners are always physically located in, and indeed often constitutive of, particular sites—yards, parks, vacant lots. Thus, in my examination of the ways urban gardeners and beekeepers produce urban life in a context of class-based inequality, I emphasize the *where* of these activities, their, quite literally, rootedness in arrangements of urban space, as well as relationships to other human and nonhuman beings. In other words, my investigation is specifically attuned to the ways gardening and beekeeping produce the environments which shape urban life and which city-dwellers inhabit. In this way, my analysis takes as a starting point a similar insight elaborated in the “spatial turn” in

anthropology—that is, the move by anthropological scholars to consider the ways in which human life is necessarily embedded in particular physical, spatial locations and the ways social relations are productive of these spaces and places (Escobar 2001; Feld and Basso 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003).

This anthropology of space and place in turn built on the work of the Chicago School and other urban ethnographers in the first half of the twentieth century, who brought critical academic attention to the ways the spatial organization of cities was related to particular social groups, as well as the relationships between cultural forms, social relations, and experiences of the built environment within neighborhoods (Hannerz 1980; Park et al. 1925; Whyte 1993). Low (2000, 2004) and other foundational theorists (Bourdieu 1977; Foucault 1979; Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994), have argued that space is not an empty container for human (and nonhuman) life, but the product of social, economic, and political relationships, something which is always in the process of being recreated. Likewise, given arrangements of space themselves influence the production of social, economic, and political relationships. In particular, scholars have concerned themselves with the ways social inequalities, such as those based on differences of class and race, shape, and are shaped by, the production of urban space. For example, Low (2004) has documented the ways gated housing communities are built in the US to cater to middle class and elite residents who express feelings of physical and social insecurity, and desire to shore up their class status by creating particular aesthetic norms, as well as physical distance, to mark a spatialized distance from class (and racial) others. As Low's insightful ethnography shows, however, these built spatial forms engender the very feelings of precarity and fear they are designed to ameliorate, thereby also maintaining the race and class ideologies that perpetuate middle class and elite concerns over dangerous, contaminating racial and class others (see also Caldeira 2005; Ghannam 2002; Zhang 2008).

In Elmwood, the social production of space is exemplified in the ways working class communities and communities of color have been concentrated in particular neighborhoods and

disproportionately borne negative impacts from deindustrialization and the transition to a service-based economy. During the mid-twentieth century, as Elmwood industrialized, large numbers of both white and black migrants arrived in the city from the rural South. According to local histories⁴ and numerous interviewees, these newcomers were not welcomed by established residents, and soon land use practices associated with this population became stigmatized. Large, prominent vegetable gardens, chicken coops, and “trash” in the one’s yard—be it actual trash or a collection of lawn ornaments or cars on blocks—all became ways of marking working class migrants as *déclassé*.

At the same time, in Elmwood as across the US, the widespread construction of residential suburbs drove changes in middle class land use norms and aesthetics. Specifically, these suburbs, in an effort to cultivate a pastoral idyll in accordance with the ideas of Andrew Jackson Downing (cf. Heiman 2015), featured single family homes on large grassy lots with minimal landscaping and no visible forms of livelihood production (see also Robbins 2007). As Hayden (2004) argues in her history of US suburbia, the emergence of suburbs, beginning in the nineteenth century and carrying through the post-World War II era, is tied up in American gender relations and ideas about morality and hygiene. In particular, advocates argued that the spacious, grassy lawns of the American suburb fostered clean environments and upright living, as opposed to the dirty inner-cities, where overcrowding and infrastructural decline fostered moral decay. This opposition implicitly indexed racial and class difference, as suburbs were economically and often legally (due to racial covenanting) inaccessible to working class households and households of color, overlaying and reinforcing existing American ideologies that equated economic prosperity with moral rectitude.

⁴ In crafting my understanding of Elmwood’s history, as well as the narrative offered in this dissertation, I relied on several published works and numerous conversations and email exchanges with local historians. In order to protect the privacy of research participants, I have omitted references to these place-specific works and professionals.

In Elmwood, middle class neighborhoods distinguished themselves throughout the 1950s and 1960s by adopting and adhering to these suburban land use aesthetics, while the suburbs themselves became, through high factory wages and cheaper housing, accessible to working-class residents and thereby a form of class mobility. Livestock were banned and vegetable gardens relegated to backyards where they would not be visible from the street; grassy lawns and neat, small-scale landscaping abounded. Meanwhile some residents of working class neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color continued to engage in stigmatized land use practices—interviewees reported chickens in these neighborhoods well into 1970s—out of necessity or tradition. While Elmwoodites reported that stigma against Southerners and their land use practices had abated by the 1970s and 1980s, new ways of indexing class through urban land use emerged as deindustrialization took hold. Boarded up windows, homes in disrepair, overgrown yards and public spaces—all became visual markers of working class neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color, negative signs that further stigmatized these groups and perpetuated their sociospatial isolation.

It is within this context, where one's neighborhood of residence and the appearance of one's home continue to be used to index class and racial identifications, that Elmwood's gardeners and beekeepers produce urban space. Depending on where they are located and what they look like, along with who participates in them and what methods are used, these gardens and beehives can both disrupt and reproduce assumptions about and processes of class formation. Consequently, these activities must be understood in terms of both how gardens and beehives come to be shaped by various social relations—specifically processes of class formation—and the ways in which Elmwoodites' experiences of urban space shape the ways they garden, keep bees, and otherwise dwell in the city.

People, however, are not the only beings that inhabit cities. As the experience of gardening makes clear, various plants, insects, fungi, microbiota, and other animals call Elmwood and its gardens home. Anthropologists studying the social production of urban space have seldom

attended to the ways nonhuman life is involved in these processes. Yet, during my research with urban gardeners and beekeepers it became clear that plants and insects were actively involved—and perceived by many gardeners to be so—in the ways gardens produced space and social relations, from their growth behaviors to their needs for habitat and nourishment to their movements (or lack thereof). I thus pose my questions regarding the kinds of urban life gardeners and beekeepers desired and nurtured in a context of class- and race-based inequality in terms of the production of the urban *environment*, where “environment” is understood as comprising both the built environment (roads, buildings, and other explicitly human generated structures and infrastructure) and what research participants, following conventions of Western thought, commonly referred to as “nature”—all the biological, geological, chemical, and atmospheric beings and processes not explicitly human or directly produced by human beings.⁵ In so doing, I contribute to the anthropological literature on urban space by expanding what is given consideration in studies of cities and urban life.

In framing my key questions in this manner, I ground my analysis in anthropological understandings of the social production of space-spatial production of social relations, while drawing on the contributions provided by research on the social reproduction of the environment and multispecies ethnography. Geographer Cindi Katz’s concept of the social reproduction of the environment, which I discuss further below, references the labor processes entailed in creating and maintaining the material circumstances that allow for all aspects of human life: economic, social, and cultural (2004:21). Such a theoretical lens facilitates my investigation of gardening as environmental labor by positioning the production of urban environments within the work of creating and maintaining the material bases of life through socially-embedded labor— what one gardener termed the “work of life.”

Throughout the dissertation I turn to the insights and approaches provided by multispecies ethnography (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010), because for most of the gardeners I

⁵ This is the definition of environment that will be used throughout the dissertation unless otherwise noted.

spoke with, gardening did not, at least exclusively, represent a kind of mastery over nature, a bending of plants and insects to suit human will. Rather, it was to varying extents considered what one gardener and beekeeper termed “a collaboration with nature.” Gardening was a way to participate in a relationship with the natural world and nonhuman beings, wherein these entities had a degree of agency that compelled a response from human gardeners, such as when gardeners changed their crop selections in response to the qualities of their soil, rather than rely on various chemical inputs in order to grow whatever they wished. This relationality is key to the ways I came to understand gardening as a form of care and creative, material labor. While anthropologists have long understood the extent to which human life is entangled in material relations to other beings (see for example the work of Julian Steward (1977) and the cultural ecology approach), they have seldom given much analytic weight to the agencies of nonhuman life in these relations, treating them more or less as part of the natural setting to which human economies, societies, and cultures responded and in which human life unfolded (Ingold 2000). Thus in my efforts to take seriously the ways gardeners considered plants, insects, and soil microbes active participants in their activities, and the types of care, creative labor, and possibilities for urban living these relationships made possible, I have relied on the work of multispecies ethnographers.

Drawing on developments in science and technology studies and biology that have questioned the integrity of boundaries drawn around biological beings at the level of both individual and species, these scholars have increasingly considered the agencies of nonhuman beings, particularly in regards to shaping human life (Haraway 2008; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010; Latour 1993; Whatmore 2002). For example, in her work on ornamental plant gardeners in Mozambique, Julie Archambault (2016) considers how the particular traits of these plants—the way they grow in response to gardeners’ ministrations, their portability and replicability, the idiosyncrasies of their appearance—makes them desirable love objects for young men in a particular social and political-economic setting that requires a degree of economic wealth for

successful courtship and marriage yet makes its acquisition increasingly difficult. Following the example of Archambault and others, who have considered the role of everything from microbes (Helmreich 2009; Paxson 2008) to dogs and trees (Kohn 2013), throughout this dissertation I attend to the active roles nonhuman beings played in shaping the ways Elmwoodites went about caring for themselves and others, engaging in creative material labor, and making class (Liechty 2003).

Together, the theoretical lens provided by the anthropology of space, coupled with insights from multispecies ethnography and the analytic of the social reproduction of the environment allow me to ask, what kinds of urban environments do Elmwood's gardeners and beekeepers create? What kinds of relationships to other human and nonhuman beings does gardening cultivate? And how are these processes shaped by, as well as shaping of, inequalities based on differences of race and class? To answer these questions, I examine gardening from two perspectives: first, the kind of labor represented by gardening, that is, the aspects of care and creativity that are enacted through the work of gardening, and second, what gardening produces, in terms of environments and processes of class formation.

The Labor of Gardening: Care in a Multispecies World

While the gardeners and beekeepers in this study cited lots of pragmatic reasons for what they did, from higher quality food to savings on grocery bills, I found that gardeners seemed just as motivated by a desire to care for their households, communities, and ecosystems. That is, they attended to the needs and desires of self, other human and non-human beings, and the environments they inhabited in ways that prioritized mutual well-being, ethical commitments, and the maintenance of existing relationships. For example, when Bill and Jane planted a border of marigolds around the vegetable garden in the front-yard of their modest home in a working-class suburban neighborhood, they were enacting care for themselves, their vegetable plants, their neighbors, and the city's ecosystems. As they explained it to me, the marigolds deter insect pests,

making them an essential part of their organic gardening methods, methods which allow them to consume pesticide-free food and prevent the seepage of toxic chemicals into the water table. They also favored the bright yellow and orange flowers because they neatly delimited the garden, adhering to neighborhood aesthetic standards that favor defined borders, while also providing pleasant visual stimuli. In other words, care is both a type of relationship—such as Bill and Jane’s relationship to their vegetable plants—and something one experiences as a result of that relationship—the signal sent to Bill and Jane’s neighbors by the marigolds that they, and their aesthetic standards, were respected. Both relationships and experiences of care, in this instance and in general, are predicated on achieving mutual well-being for both giver and receiver (Buch 2015).

Understanding the relationality of care, evidenced in Bill and Jane’s gardening, leads to two further insights. First, as elaborated by scholars like Tronto (1993), care requires ongoing communication and negotiation, or “tinkering” (Mol and Pols 2010). In an effort to expand their garden, Bill and Jane adapted their successful use of marigold-edged vegetable beds to create other forms of edible landscaping. In 2014 their front walkway was lined with purple bush beans and begonias; “I wouldn’t do that in my yard,” said a neighbor, “but I think what they’ve done looks nice.” This kind of active exploration and creativity leads Tronto (1993) to elaborate an ethics of care,⁶ a continual process of decision making and action that seeks to optimize the well-being of all parties involved with respect to their mutuality and interdependence by placing greater importance on maintaining relationships than maximizing one’s personal positions (see also McDowell 2004; Mol 2008). Understood in this way care involves sacrifices and trade-offs, working within constraints and among competing needs and desires, such that each party reaches the best outcome they can together, rather than what might be attainable as individuals (Han 2012; Jarvis 2005). While Bill and Jane would like to turn their entire front-yard into a vegetable garden,

⁶ As opposed to an ethics of justice, which is oriented toward an external, stable, objective good (Tronto 1993).

they have expanded cautiously and judiciously, ensuring that their desires for local, organic food do not infringe upon their neighborhood's land use norms, thereby strengthening relationships to their neighbors. Thus insofar as care requires a relationship between at least two parties, and caring practice is predicated on the maintenance of that relationship, care necessitates active, ongoing negotiation amidst ever-shifting needs, desires, and contexts.

This leads to the second insights, which is that relations of care ought to be understood within the social and political-economic contexts in which they are necessarily embedded. Acts of care, like tending the ill, educating children, or maintaining a community garden, advance the interests of the caregiver only insofar as they also realize the well-being of the cared-for. Thus, in a society where political-economic relations are predicated on ideas of individual competition for scarce resources this work very frequently falls to those groups, such as women and people of color, who are already constructed as less-than within existing structures of inequality based on differences of race and gender (Glenn 1992). As numerous feminist and anthropological scholars of healthcare systems have demonstrated, doctors, an elite profession with a great deal of autonomy, are far more likely to be white men than nurses and in-home health aides, who perform more intimate and on-going care work for far less money and prestige (Kleinman 2009; Meyer 2015; Stacey 2005). Such dynamics have led Glenn (1992) and others to argue that care work itself has become a form of racialization and gendering, evident, for example, in the ways young girls are socialized to express sensitive, nurturing dispositions toward others (Gilligan 1982).

In my study, gardeners of all different racial identifications and income levels cited benefits to household nutrition and savings on grocery bills. If meeting material needs in a healthy and affordable fashion was a form of care work that cut across racial and class difference, the ways gardening was used to care for communities and ecosystems did indeed vary in race and class differentiated ways. In working class and majority African-American neighborhoods in Elmwood, where there was little access to safe, outdoor recreational spaces, community gardens

played an important role in providing public green space and safe places for youth to gather and learn. While community gardens in more white and affluent neighborhoods certainly performed this kind of care work, they also had more individual resources available to devote to the private fulfillment of outdoor recreation and youth education. Residents in these neighborhoods were thus able to place greater emphasis on care for urban ecosystems, for example, by making portions of their garden into pollinator habitat. This is not to say that working class gardeners and gardeners of color did not attend to the well-being of nonhuman species. Nor is it to suggest that the labor of caring for urban ecosystems is not a response to perceived shortcomings in the urban environment. Indeed, the lack of effective policies at the state and federal level to regulate the drivers of global climate change and mitigate its impacts is one of the key reasons cited by more eco-conscious gardeners for their labor.

Whether realized through environmental policy, public social services like parks and after-school programs, or community gardens, what these contrasting examples make clear is that society relies on the work of care to reproduce itself, to keep people and the environments they inhabit healthy, and to create and nurture a new generation. Yet care work, and those that perform it, remain systematically devalued, a fact that feminist scholars such as Hartmann (1997) have tied directly to capitalist economic relations. Capitalist economies, she argues, rely on the mutual, systematic devaluation of care work and workers to externalize the costs of social reproduction to unremunerated household labor, resource-strapped communities, and low-wage, racialized, work (see also Jarvis 2005; Katz 2001). Whether meeting community needs left unfulfilled by public and private institutions or rendering their communities more ecologically sustainable, the care work performed by gardeners in Elmwood demonstrates the ways care is embedded in such unequal social and political-economic relations. While the use of gardening to enact care itself did not appear to have the racializing and gendering effects of care performed in domestic and healthcare settings, the objects of care by gardeners did vary in ways related to experiences of

class inequality such that using gardens to care for particular entities, for example ecosystems, became a way class relations were produced in Elmwood.

In employing a relational understanding of care, I am able to identify the ways gardening was actively used by certain Elmwoodites to create and maintain relationships predicated on mutual well-being with a variety of human and nonhuman beings. I investigate these relationships of care along two axes. First, I compare how these relationships varied across differences of class and race. Second, I show the ways the caring relationships of white, middle-class gardeners intersected with city planning and development policy priorities so as to create specific understandings (or lack thereof) of gardening citywide. Through these two analytical approaches, I attend to ways existing social and spatial inequalities, based on differences of class and race, necessarily shape, and are shaped by, relations and acts of care. In adopting this relational approach to care, however, I also seek to expand the ways care is most frequently understood and operationalized in anthropological inquiry through serious consideration of the participation of nonhuman beings in relations of care. Heeding Aulino's (2016) urging to interrogate the ways care comes to be defined, understood, and practiced, I use gardening to investigate what it means to enroll non-human, complex entities into relations of care, how we determine what our mutual well-being is, and what kinds of new or transformational relationships care makes (or does not make) possible. How are we to understand the experience of Maria, who talks about her "bee vision" and the ways her sensory experience of the city, and her own sense of ecological interconnectedness, have been altered through her work as a beekeeper? If, as Tsing (2015) suggests, we live in a condition that impels us toward collaboration with a host of human and non-human others, what role does care, such as that Maria enacts toward and along with honeybees, have to play in negotiating a good life for all of us? Following the insights of scholars such as Whatmore (2002) and Myers (2015), I consider the ways relations of care with nonhuman beings are both based in and provoke gardeners' considerations of what it means to live well with others, human and nonhuman, now and into the future. In so doing I strive to keep open the

possibility that acts of care like gardening could create new or different kinds of relationships between gardeners and both human and non-human others.

The Labor of Gardening: Creativity—or Material Labor in the Postindustrial, Postmodern World

In the 1930s Ford Motor Company built a production facility in the Elmwood area, and by 1960 there were two more automobile plants within a fifteen-minute commute from the city. Workers flocked to Elmwood to labor in these and neighboring factories, many of them migrating from the rural American South. These newcomers, white and black alike, faced discrimination and hostility from well-established Elmwoodites, though over time this would abate as the city transformed into working-class industrial town. Further upheavals awaited the city though, as deindustrialization began in the 1980s. Elmwood's factories, like those throughout Michigan and the industrial North and Midwest, began to lay-off workers, automate production, and move facilities to sites of lower-cost, non-unionized labor. At the same time new federal policies reduced funding for social services and instituted a neoliberal approach to governance, which mandated individual responsibility for social and economic well-being while retaining the power of the state to facilitate capital exchange and punish citizens (Collins et al. 2008; Harvey 2005). A purportedly new economy emerged from this confluence, one focused on the provision of services by flexible workers and heavily bifurcated between well-remunerated financial and informational service employees and those precariously employed in low-wage retail, food service, and other similar sectors (Ho 2009). For many Elmwoodites, this meant seeking employment from the city's remaining institutional employers—a hospital and university—or commuting to the universities, hospitals, tech hubs, and retail establishments in the neighboring wealthy suburbs of Detroit or the increasingly affluent City of Ann Arbor.

The results of these complex, global political-economic processes were similar in Elmwood to those in many other Rust Belt cities. While white, middle-class neighborhoods have managed to remain relatively stable by attracting new residents to homes that would be

unaffordable to them in more affluent cities nearby, neighborhoods where working-class residents and residents of color have been concentrated by historic discrimination and proximity to industrial employers have not fared so well. Relatively high numbers of vacant homes and abandoned lots, coupled with resource-strapped residents, have made basic upkeep like fresh paint and brush removal, and thus the maintenance of property values, difficult. Popular discourses of personal responsibility that equate such visual markers of socioeconomic decline with moral failures, and that index majority African-American neighborhoods as dangerous and crime-ridden, have further contributed to the disinvestment in these communities.

The city itself also struggles to make ends meet. With industrial land uses gone, and existing business districts still studded with vacant storefronts, most of the city's tax base is residential (in addition, approximately 40% of the city's land is non-taxable due to ownership by non-profit entities). With so little revenue, the municipal government has been forced to reduce itself to essential services; things like the parks and recreation department were dismantled years before I arrived in 2013. While basic maintenance of the parks is done by the public works department, any recreational activities or improvements must be undertaken by community members and non-governmental partners. This creates a further dimension of sociospatial inequality, as more affluent neighborhoods are better able to compensate. For example, a long derelict fountain in a city park adjacent to a primarily white, middle-class neighborhood, was removed and replaced with a native-plant rain garden in 2010 through volunteer labor and fundraising organized through the neighborhood association.

Yet two key factors make the experience of deindustrialization in Elmwood unique—its small size and a widespread DIY (do-it-yourself) ethos. While the history of industrialization, Southern migration, and deindustrialization has left large social and cultural gaps between segments of the population, they are not ones from which residents can be completely isolated in their day-to-day lives. There is a large vacant property in the middle of downtown, and the public debate over what kinds of development should go there routinely broke down along discernable

class (and racial) lines. Greasy spoon diners where former auto workers continue to gather sit alongside new restaurants with trendy menus appealing to the city and surrounding region's more affluent residents which in turn neighbor black hair salons and barbershops. This generates conflict, such as the case of the aforementioned vacant property, where residents disagree over holding out for development that would attract more affluent residents or allowing any business which might employ people (such as the dollar store that went in during my fieldwork) to be built. It also, however, prompts greater consideration of these divides. For example, a local business owner has staunchly resisted the co-optation of their establishment by elites by keeping prices low, employing local people of color, and being an active participant in local social justice efforts, such as Black Lives Matter.

Meanwhile, across racial and class difference, a spirit of DIY to improve the city pervades, exemplified in the aforementioned fountain replacement project. What this example, and the DIY ethos underlying it, makes clear, is that while Elmwood may be a "zone of abandonment" (Hamer 2011), it is also a place where people go on living and caring for their city. Nor are these efforts limited to well-off neighborhoods. The community center in a working-class, majority African-American neighborhood has been maintained, and continues to offer after-school and summer programming, through strategic partnerships with a nearby community college and various non-profit organizations, as well as tireless efforts from community members. Ironically exemplifying the ethics of personal responsibility and hard work that have been used to justify the city's abandonment through economic disinvestment and retrenchment of state services, many Elmwoodites were engaged in various projects intended to make life in the city better. One such type of project was backyard and community gardening and livestock raising. While providing food for residents, gardens also created for some a pleasurable visual experience and a place to socialize. Beyond these impacts, gardens also communicated vitality and attention, important messages in an environment frequently characterized by abandonment. They provided

a source of pride for neighbors, a sense of character for the city. “They [the gardens] contribute to a sense that Elmwood is a good place to live,” one public official told me.

There are many ways one can go about improving life in their community, nor did all gardeners in Elmwood include such improvements among their reasons for gardening. Thus, it was important that I understand why people gardened, and for those so inclined, why they chose this activity to make their lives, and their city, better. In interviews, after asking about the benefits of gardening and the various ways interviewees were involved in their communities (neighborhood association member, parent-teacher board, non-profit volunteer, etc.) I asked people to reflect on the challenges of life in Elmwood and in Michigan. What emerged from many of these conversations were compelling narratives about the ways gardeners felt disconnected—from the material bases of life, from their own labor, from the institutions shaping their city and region. They spoke about corrupt local governments and byzantine bureaucracies, corporations polluting waterways and not held to account, food that came from halfway around the world and did not nourish their bodies, and jobs that left them wondering what they did all day. For each person that spoke in this manner gardening played an important role in reconnecting them to their bodies, homes, and communities. Time and again they marveled at the power of a seed to grow into a plant that nourished their bodies, and the power of their labor to make such things happen. Gardeners recounted stories of neighbors met through sharing surplus produce, and their belief that city a more attractive place to live and their ecosystems more sustainable as a result of their gardens.

These narratives emerged from the political-economic context of Elmwood, but also from the ways gardening encourages practitioners to enroll various other human and nonhuman beings into relationships of care. Indeed, in these gardeners’ tellings, it is the aspect of dynamic, multispecies care work that makes gardens creative places brimming with possibilities for reconnection. “I want that for my son,” Dylan, a backyard gardener tells me, “to know it’s [food] not something that’s separate from us. You don’t go to a store, it’s here in the earth. To be part of

that and to nurture something that can nurture you, I like that cycle.” This sense of disconnection, from nature, one’s labor, and the basics of life, and the resulting dealienation reported by gardeners, resonates with recent work on consumer culture, neoliberal capitalism, and alienation (e.g Isenhour 2011b; Miller 2001; Paxson 2010; Wilk 2001; Zukin 2008), which has explored and problematized, for example, the ways middle-class Americans use consumption for everything from political activism to more ‘authentic’ relationships to the places they live. Thus, in my investigation of the labor of gardening, I place Elmwoodites’ narratives of reconnection to land and labor in relation to studies of contemporary US and Western consumer culture and political economy, working to identify the ways gardeners are specifically embedded within these structures. I ask: how do gardeners come to desire opportunities for creative, material labor? What is it about gardening that fulfills these desires? How are experiences of alienation and reconnection shaped by class- and race-based inequalities, and in turn, how does gardening as reconnection shape the experience of these inequalities? Together, the lenses of care and creativity offer a critical understanding of the labor of gardening by highlighted the ways this labor was used to create and maintain relationships of mutual well-being with myriad others, work that also served to ameliorate experiences of disconnection from social and environmental life.

The Products of Gardening: Social Reproduction of the Environment

If gardening is to be understood as a kind of caring, creative material labor, what must subsequently be addressed are the ends to which it is being put. In other words, what do gardeners, and their gardens, produce? In this dissertation, I argue that in addition to food, and relationships to human and nonhuman beings, gardeners participate in the production of the urban environments in which they and others live. To frame these acts of environmental production, I rely on the concept of the social reproduction of the environment.

First posited by Engels (1972) and later elaborated by socialist-feminist activists and scholars, the concept of social reproduction emerges from a combined critique of capitalism and patriarchy. These authors, such as Hartmann (1997) have argued that capitalist economic systems are able to generate profits because they do not pay the full costs of labor; workers not only need to be kept alive, but a new generation produced. This requires the labor of raising, educating, and otherwise caring for children so that they may grow up to be persons capable of participating in shared ways of life, including participation in capitalist economic relations, and the maintenance of the social relations and cultural forms which underlie human life. Following the argument of socialist-feminists, in capitalist and patriarchal societies this work is relegated to women laboring outside the market economy, where their unremunerated labor both subsidizes capitalism and reinforces regimes of gender inequality—their performance of this labor legitimates both their lower social standing and the devaluation of the work they perform (Dalla Costa and James 1973; Federici 2012; see also the edited volumes Hanson and Philipson 1990; Hennessy and Ingraham 1997). Later scholarship has addressed the ways this formulation overlooks the experiences of working-class women, women of color, and Third World women, who often perform socially reproductive labor for others, either through violent coercion or capitalist labor markets (Breines 2006; Carby 1997; The Combahee River Collective 1977; Mies 1998). Even as they have expanded to address the ways class inequalities, racial hierarchies, and colonialism facilitate capitalism and gender inequality, the core elements of socialist-feminist insight remain relevant: the dominant social, political-economic system in the US and Europe (and increasingly, the rest of the world) not only successfully effects the oppression of over half its population, but also systematically disinvests in the very social and cultural bases of its existence.

It is with respect to this understanding of disinvestment that Katz develops her own conception of social reproduction in the context of neoliberal forms of capitalism. Following from the premise that social reproduction is to a degree always place-based, as the “fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life” (2001:711) must occur somewhere, Katz argues that the

heightened spatial mobility of global, neoliberal capitalism creates “disjunctures” between investments in production and social reproduction. Using examples drawn from the lives of children, such as derelict playgrounds in New York City, she considers the ways this disinvestment and disjuncture manifests in the material settings in which the work of social reproduction occurs and on which it relies. Through this analysis, Katz formulates a tripartite understanding of social reproduction, which includes political-economic aspects that reproduce for example, work knowledges and class relations; the transmission of cultural forms and practices that allow an individual to participate in social life; and environmental aspects which include all the material grounds on which these activities occur and rely (Katz 2004:19–21).

In using the framework provided by social reproduction, and in particular, social reproduction of the environment, I build on two particular aspects of this work. First, I seek to engage the political aspects of this project. At its core, the concept of social reproduction as developed by socialist-feminists and later generations of feminist scholars and activists represents a critique of the ways capitalist economic relations fail to, and in fact cannot, account for the true costs of producing and maintaining collective human life, and the exploitation of racial, class, and gender inequalities to make up for this failure. Yet despite its systematic devaluation and use as a tool of oppression, the work of social reproduction continues, in large part because it must. Moreover, it is the work of raising children, of passing on cultural traditions, of tending to the places one lives, that gives many people a sense of satisfaction and meaning in life (Mitchell et al. 2003; Meehan and Strauss 2015). In this way, social reproduction does not necessarily follow the logics of the market economy, but also includes the logics of a moral economy; it is not something undertaken to maximize individual self-interest, but because it is deemed the desirable and ethically correct thing to do. Likewise, gardening, as a form of creative care work and production of the environment, would seem to include logics of collaboration that seek mutual well-being, and represent a non-market form of labor directed specifically at making the kinds of environmental conditions people want for themselves and others. This is always important, but all

the more so in Elmwood, where decades of deindustrialization have rendered urban environments all too frequently characterized by a lack of care for residents' environmental needs and desires, be they recreational green space or ecological sustainability in the face of global climate change.

Second, in employing Katz's concept of the social reproduction of the environment, I seek to better understand the productive capacities of gardening. In describing the necessity of maintaining and reproducing the material locatedness of everyday life, Katz attends to the ways human labor is engaged in the work, directly and indirectly, of making the environments that people inhabit, including relations to the natural world. Such an inclusion of the production of environments within the labor of social reproduction provides a framework for interpreting the ways Elmwoodites undertake caring, creative material labor through gardening. In other words, it facilitates an analysis of the ways these gardeners use nonmarket labor to create the kinds of environments in which the desire to live themselves, and in relation to various human and nonhuman others.

That gardening does indeed represent a form of social reproduction of the environment is exemplified in numerous gardeners' experiences, such as that of Lara, the home-gardener quoted at the outset of this chapter. By growing a portion of her household's vegetables and cultivating habitat for pollinating insects, Lara created an environment that contributed to the material sustenance of her household and, through the care shown to pollinators, others in the city. She also created an environment that spiritually nourished her, helping to provide the non-material sustenance she needed to be a wife, mother, and neighbor. Finally, through details like a sidewalk facing bench, Lara sought to make an environment that encouraged particular types of everyday interactions, among people and between people and nonhuman beings. Drawing on her spiritual beliefs; cultural heritage; social roles as a wife, mother, and neighbor; and her desires to live in more ecologically sustainable, socially equitable, and civically engaged ways, Lara reproduced the environment immediately surrounding her home in ways that also extend into her neighborhood and her city.

While this example demonstrates the ways gardening is used in the social reproduction of the environment, it also opens questions in need of further investigation. Given the importance of nonhuman beings to Lara and similarly eco-conscious—and primarily white and middle-class—gardeners, and the influence this care has on their gardening methods, I draw on the insights of multispecies ethnography to ask, what role do nonhuman beings, like pollinating insects and the garden plants themselves, have in the social reproduction of the environment in Elmwood? Due to the fact gardening is a direct, creative engagement with the material world, it allows gardeners to go about producing their environments in very intentional ways. This requires questions about what kinds of environments gardeners like Lara desire, and what social factors, such as experiences of inequality based on differences of class and race, shape the formation of these desires and the ways gardeners are able and willing to pursue them. Thus I ask, what experiences and beliefs inform gardeners' desires for more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable forms of urban life, and what do such forms of life entail in their particular neighborhoods and socioeconomic contexts? That is, how do gardeners engage in the work of socially reproducing their environments across differences of race and class?

The Products of Gardening: Class and Urban Land Use

While the conceptualization of social reproduction thus far has focused on the necessity and desirability of this labor for human life writ large, as all the scholars cited thus far have also argued, this labor involves creating workers to participate in capitalist economic relations. This in turn entails reproducing and naturalizing the particular kinds of social relations which facilitate the functioning of capitalist economies, such as relationships of inequality based on differences of class and race. Consequently, gardening and livestock raising must be analyzed in terms of the social relationships in which these activities are embedded and which shape the ways these forms of labor are carried out and interpreted by others. Gardening necessarily requires some form of access to land. It also materially alters that land in ways that are perceptible by others, primarily

visually (though both gardens and especially livestock raising also change the smells and sounds of urban land), thus altering the experience of urban space for both gardeners and other city-dwellers. While gardeners related primarily to one another through the shared experience of gardening, my research indicates that one of the main ways they related to the broader urban populace was through the *appearance* of their gardens. Gardener after gardener I interviewed shared stories about explaining to neighbors why they were creating large mounds of leaves and sticks (to form hugelkultur beds), or tearing out their front lawns to plant vegetables, or to ask permission (required under city zoning ordinance) to keep a beehive. As a result, urban land use aesthetics and policy became one of the primary frameworks through which I sought to understand gardening as a social relationship.

While inequalities based on differences of race and gender have impacted access to land in Elmwood, and have been markers through which different forms of land use practice are understood in relation to one another, class emerged as a particularly salient social relation with respect to gardening and urban land use aesthetics in the city. Insofar as class indexes differential access to material resources, the very ability to access land for gardening, and particularly the ownership of that land, results in class-differentiated forms of gardening. Those with homes and yards of their own could garden, within limits, where and how they wished. Those without such access, for example the gardeners of Towerview renting high-rise apartments, had to rely on maintaining good relationships with their landlord, which meant adhering to particular expectations as to how the property would look, such as making sure all wooden structures were painted the same standard shade of green. Due to the ways Elmwood's neighborhoods have historically sorted along class-lines, class relations have come to be spatialized in the city, and frequently rendered intelligible through the appearance of different types of land use within the context of the particular neighborhood in which they were located. For example, because working-class residents were concentrated in particular neighborhoods, these neighborhoods experienced a higher rate of vacant houses during deindustrialization. Thus, boarded up windows

and overgrown yards were more common in these locations and became key visual markers of neighborhood residents' class status. While always remaining oriented to the ways social inequalities are intersectional (hooks 1990), it is through the lens of class, with particular attention to the ways these relationships intersect with race, that I analyze how unequal social relationships shape, and are shaped by, gardening and livestock raising practices.

In this dissertation, I employ an understanding of class as a type of relationship that while rooted in material production and inequality, comes into being through social relations that are neither determined nor fixed (Hall 1986). Following Willis (1977), I understand that unequal material relations must find their expression through existing cultural forms and ideologies, such as the ways equations of masculinity with manual labor have forestalled working-class mobility via education. In Elmwood, this is evident in “the valorization of the single-family, owner-occupied home,” as one city official put it, wherein home-ownership is used to express both working-class residents' claims to respectability and the value middle-class residents placed on economic stability and civic responsibility. In this way I foreground how relationships of class are always in the process of formation; class is not fixed, but always being recreated through the ways, both old and new, people find to relate to one another (Liechty 2003).

Due to the fact that class relations, deriving as they do from material inequality and subsequent differential access to cultural and political resources, are hierarchical, I employ Bourdieu's (1984) concept of “distinction” to reference the ways participants in class relationships work to consolidate, reproduce, and even elevate their status by distinguishing themselves from class ‘others’ via activities like consumption. Recent studies of alternative agrifood practice, for example, have investigated how consuming local, organic foods, which are necessarily more expensive and often more difficult to obtain than industrially produced, supermarket counterparts, has become a new way for middle class eaters to distinguish themselves and reproduce their class status (Guthman 2003; Isenhour 2011a).

By focusing on the ways class is a relationship in process, I also draw attention to the ways in which it is both expressive and embodied. As I have argued, class extends beyond labor relations, to encompass relationships amongst family and friends, leisure activities, and bodily health and experiences of illness, as well as consumption (Bettie 2003:42; Walley 2013). Thus, gardeners in Elmwood form class identifications through a host of relationships and cultural forms, such as ownership of land, leisure time to devote to gardening, preferences for how one's yard should look, level of education, and ability to influence city policy-making.

In order to determine Elmwoodites' class identifications, therefore, I rely on a multi-faced approach. When asked, the participants in my study, like most Americans, were uncomfortable classing themselves and almost always described themselves as middle class. While I try to honor the ways research participants identified themselves, they and the residents of Elmwood are clearly not all middle class. Finer gradations are analytically necessary and empirically observable. To make these distinctions, I rely on a tripartite analysis. First is what participants reported, beyond identifications as middle class. Several mentioned they grew up poor, or were from working class backgrounds. Others recounted personal labor histories or how they thought of themselves as blue-collar. Second are the basic demographic data I was able to collect through surveys. Nearly all interview participants completed a basic survey first, which served as a way to solicit interview participants and provide some basic information with which to craft more directed interview questions. Through these surveys I was able to ascertain many participants' household income, education level, and home-ownership status. Finally, I consider the expressive elements of class, particularly the ways land use aesthetics operated as a form of class performance, and how those performances are embedded in the spatialization of class through neighborhood-level differentiation.

Finally, I consider the *habitus* of class (Bourdieu 1984), that is the ways family histories, life experiences, education, employment, and myriad other social and economic factors come together to shape how Elmwoodites perceive and respond to the world. The effects of class

habitus were particularly evident and relevant to gardening in the ways they manifested through preferences and practices regarding land use aesthetics. How residents wanted their yards and gardens to look, and their expectations of how their neighbors' yards and gardens should appear, were the product of a lifetime of observing and participating in the assessment of self and others on the basis of these aesthetics, as well as the effects of differential access to material and social resources. Thus, while I understand class to be an ongoing process of relating and distinguishing self with regard to others, I also understand it to be a process embedded in both unequal material relations and the complex ways people have come to consider themselves as actors in the world.

In other words, within Elmwood's particular history of sociospatial production and inequality, gardens have come to take on particular meanings. Within working class and majority African-American neighborhoods concerns about keeping gardens neat, while also using them to compensate for strained livelihoods and lack of investment in public green space and social reproduction, were inextricable from historic discrimination against these groups, based in part on land use practices, and their continued unequal access to resources. This is evident in sites like Towerview, where gardeners directly linked their efforts to their fellow poor, elderly or disabled residents' lack of access to outdoor gathering space and recreation. Meanwhile in middle-class, primarily white neighborhoods, concerns with maintaining class status through adherence to suburban aesthetic norms existed in tension with more environmentally-minded gardeners' desires to enact certain forms of ecological care, such as grass-free lawns and front-yard vegetable gardens, desires which were given special attention in Elmwood's master plan. This plan seeks to foster a green, creative urban future for the city, and highlights activities like urban agriculture and local food based economies as key components of that imagining. This privileging of particular kinds of gardening, and thus particular kinds of gardeners, created dynamics within the city's planning and development policy that were reminiscent of Checker's (2008) concept of "environmental gentrification," understood as the dynamics by which urban environmental sustainability projects provide benefits desired by low-income residents who are nevertheless

harmed by the social and spatial displacements that follow as middle-class residents begin moving into what becomes a more desirable place to live as it supports their “green” lifestyles. Thus, in my investigations of gardening and beekeeping as forms of care and creativity I ask what kinds of class relations are being produced. In what ways do working class residents’ concerns with neatness maintain assumptions about working class morality while simultaneously attempting to use land use aesthetics as a tool of class mobility? Are new forms of middle class status and identification being created by eco-conscious gardeners through their ability to use environmentalist discourses to influence city land use policy while creating new forms of distinction via novel land uses? By examining the work of gardening as a kind of caring, creative, material labor, I show how this activity is embedded as much in people’s experiences of class and race based inequality as it is in their desires for mutual well-being and reconnection. This is an important analytical move because it facilitates our understandings of both the kinds of environments gardeners and beekeepers are trying to produce as well as the processes of class formation that emerge from this labor.

Alternative Agrifood Practices

Urban gardening and beekeeping are particularly rich sites from which to consider processes of class formation, predicated as they are on access to urban space and material resources. As part of a suite of activities that have come to be called “alternative agrifood practices,”⁷ gardening and beekeeping might be implicated in the processes of white, middle-class identity formation and gentrification through community-supported agriculture (CSA) and farmers’ markets identified

⁷ The term alternative agrifood (in reference to both systems and practices) is used by Allen (2004) as a way to recognize the interconnected work of the sustainable agriculture and community food security movements. The production, distribution, and consumption of food are inter-related processes, and in using the term “agrifood” I follow Allen in attempting to recognize the co-constitutive nature of agricultural and food-based economies and practices. These practices, understood as activities with histories that recreate specific kinds of relationships and ways of being in the world (Bourdieu 1977), comprise what are in turn known as “alternative agrifood systems;” that is, systematic configurations of food production, transportation, sales, consumption, and waste disposal.

by scholars such as Jarosz (2011), Alkon (2012) and Zukin (2008). Yet studies such as these have not directly addressed gardening and the ways it is involved in making class and processes of gentrification. Thus in focusing on the relationships between gardening and class, I seek to address this gap in the literature.

Alternative agrifood practices are a wide and ever-changing set of activities, certain key practices are widely recognized and of particular relevance to this study: organic farming methods; permaculture; free-range and other humane forms of livestock production; community-supported agriculture; farmers' markets; urban agriculture; community and school gardens; local growers' and consumers' cooperatives; locally-based production, distribution, and consumption; and various kinds of home provisioning and preservation techniques, like canning and pickling.⁸ While many of these alternative agrifood practices occurred in Elmwood or involved Elmwood residents to some extent, this research project focused primarily on individual and community urban gardening and livestock raising among white, middle-class urban dwellers. Scholarship of urban gardening⁹ and livestock raising in the US has addressed two major themes. One body of work is primarily concerned with identifying the types of connections, to people, land, and nonhuman beings, that urban gardening engenders.¹⁰ For example, White (2010, 2011) documents how an African-American community in Detroit used a community farm to provide healthy food and economic opportunities, ensure culturally appropriate education and community green space,

⁸ These practices derive their alterity from the types of relationships between producers, distributors, consumers, and the actual food in question they engender; in other words, from the type of agrifood system they create. Whereas industrial agriculture is predicated on strict divisions between producers, distributors, and consumers; maximizing production and profits by scaling up and standardizing; and externalizing costs to environmental quality and the bodily health of animals, human and otherwise; alternative agrifood systems are predicated on a desire to reconnect all participants—plants, animals, and people—and to minimize negative impacts on the environment, human health and society, and nonhuman beings' welfare.

⁹ I use the term urban gardening to refer to forms of food production that are not the primary-basis of practitioners' livelihoods. This is distinct from urban agriculture, a term I will use only when specifically referring to urban food production practices that are primary sources of livelihood.

¹⁰ For work on the ways gardens are used to communicate ideas about land use and value, and build community relations see Lawson 2005; Shiner et al. 2004. For work on urban gardening as a form of connection to local food systems, communities, and environments see DeLind 2002; Kneafsey et al. 2008; Turner 2011. Within a context of deindustrialization and social inequality, urban gardening has been identified as a way to supplement economic livelihoods, challenge spatial disinvestment, and further social inclusion, see Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004; von Hassell 2002.

and demonstrate alternative pathways for developing vacant land. A second body of work on urban gardening has taken up critiques of alternative agrifood practices more broadly, which have focused on the use of consumption-based activism and the reproduction of social inequalities.¹¹ Researchers studying urban gardening in particular have demonstrated the ways community gardeners exclude people by focusing on vandalism and crime prevention over community outreach and involvement (Glover 2004), and generate support for neoliberal policies by emphasizing individual self-sufficiency (Pudup 2008).

Among Elmwood's gardeners and beekeepers I observed both the production of new kinds of relationships to people, land, and place, and the reproduction of sociospatial inequalities based on differences of class and race identified by scholars such as White (2011) and Pudup (2008), respectively. In this regard, these practitioners' experiences were not particularly unique, neither with respect to the literature on alternative agrifood practice nor the investigations into the anthropology of space. What did make Elmwood gardeners and beekeepers' activities analytically interesting were the ways these residents' desires to create more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable forms of urban life intersected with class- and race-based inequalities. In particular, I examine the ways eco-conscious kinds of gardening, practiced primarily by white, middle-class residents, were privileged through the Elmwood master plan's focus on creating a green, creative city. This privileging diverted attention within city's planning and development policy, and public discussions regarding it, away from the more banal and community-focused concerns motivating gardening in working-class communities and communities of color, in a process I analyze as a form of "environmental gentrification" (cf. Checker 2008). Thus, I focus primarily on the ways gardeners and beekeepers' efforts to care for their households, communities, and ecosystems through creative, material labor produced urban environments

¹¹ For work on consumption-based activism and alternative agrifood practices, see Bryant and Goodman 2004; Guthman 2008. For work on the elision of politics and social inequalities based on differences of race and class, see Allen 2004; Guthman 2003; Markowitz 2010; Slocum 2007. For work on the role of alternative agrifood practices in constructing white, middle-class identities, see Alkon and McCullen 2011; Jarosz 2011; Pilgeram 2011.

within a context of sociospatial inequalities based on differences of class and race. That is, I ask, how did Elmwoodites' experiences of race- and class-based inequalities shape both the ways they formulated desires for more equitable and sustainable urban living and how they went about using gardening and beekeeping to pursue those desires? What kinds of environments did these activities produce?

Outline of the Present Work

While Elmwoodites attempts to grapple with the conditions of their everyday lives and their desires for the future of their city emerged in many different ways, in this dissertation I focus on questions regarding what kinds of labor gardening was and what this labor produced by considering how gardeners and beekeepers in Elmwood enacted care and creativity through their practices, how they produced their environments, and how class shaped, and was shaped by, these processes. I begin with the history of Elmwood, tracing the histories of Native American, white, and African-American settlement, industrialization, and deindustrialization. In so doing I attend to the narratives that are all too often subsumed in the stories Elmwoodites tell themselves about their history and in the discussions about these processes that have emerged in academic literature. In particular, I focus on the history of Elmwood as a black city, the role of Southern migration in the city's industrialization, and the ways deindustrialization (and neoliberalism) continue to operate through existing lines of racial and class difference. I also address the histories of Elmwood's nonhuman inhabitants, particularly orchards and chickens, and discuss the ways Elmwoodites are attempting to reckon with deindustrialization and imagine a postindustrial future.

I begin my ethnographic investigation of gardening, and the kind of labor it represented, with Chapter 3, an exploration of urban vegetable gardening and beekeeping as practices of care. I demonstrate the ways urban vegetable gardeners and beekeepers in Elmwood used these activities to care for their households, communities, and ecosystems. Drawing on the experiences of three backyard gardeners and two community gardens, I follow the entanglements these

individuals and groups created between themselves and various human and nonhuman beings as they sought to fulfill ethical commitments to their mutual well-being, both now and into the future. In so doing I also attend to the unevenness of care work, asking questions about whose needs and desires were being met through gardening and beekeeping, and who was able to enact care through these types of practices. I continue this ethnographic inquiry in Chapter 4 by considering the ways gardening is a form of physical labor and tangible engagement with the material world. As such, it offers practitioners an opportunity to engage directly in sensuous labor and creative production. Through the narratives of four vegetable gardeners I examine the types of material spaces and sensory experiences they created, the ways these experiences engendered a sense of reconnection to land and labor, the class politics of gardening as urban land use, and the ways practitioners used the creative possibilities of gardening to pursue food sovereignty and universal access to gardening spaces. Whether due to violent histories of racialized slavery and labor, disempowering social discourses on disability, or merely the alienation and anomie of neoliberal labor and urban life, the gardeners in this chapter experienced a desire to reconnect with “the basics of life,” to reclaim their labor and control over their food, and to express their creativity, experiences which I contextualize through an attention to the political economy of gardening labor.

I then turn to investigate the products of gardening labor, beginning in Chapter 5 with the kinds of urban environments gardeners and beekeepers produce. I use the lens of social reproduction of the environment to consider the contrasting experiences of two women seeking to create more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable forms of urban life. I focus on the ways these women used gardening to transmit traditional knowledge about growing food and to care for neighbors, strangers, and bees, as well as the ways gardening was entangled with their own personal histories and experiences of inequalities based on differences of class and race. In ways that are deeply embedded in their personal histories, moral values, and spirituality, these women gardened in order to create everyday lives and futures, both immediate and distant, in

which they and their families, as well as both human and non-human others, could live well and flourish. Yet these efforts are shaped by existing political economies and inequalities based on differences of class and race (and in this case, gender), leading me to interrogate the ways these inequalities impact gardeners' efforts to fulfill ethical commitments to living well together.

During the period of my research in Elmwood the city rewrote its master plan and made decisions regarding the development of a large, publically owned vacant lot. These events, which open Chapter 6, sparked very public and at times contentious debates about land use and economic development priorities in the city, in which vegetable gardening, beekeeping, and other alternative agrifood activities played a role. People asked of themselves and others, what is the place of alternative agrifood activities—including farmers' markets, livestock raising, food processing, and gardening for surplus—in our city? What are our aesthetic standards regarding these activities? How much should our economy rely on alternative agrifood activities? Using these conversations as a starting point, this chapter recounts residents' experiences of these public debates and their own perspectives on the role of alternative agrifood activities in urban land use and economic development policy. I pay particular attention to the ways these accounts are shaped by experiences of inequalities based on class and race and histories of industrialization and deindustrialization, and to the ways these inequalities and political economic processes influence whose narratives inform policy making and decisions. Employing the concept of environmental gentrification (Checker 2008), I juxtapose accounts of land use and economic development policy as it pertains to gardening by city officials with those of ordinary residents, including the often-erased history of gardening and urban renewal in the city's African-American neighborhood, and contrast two collective gardening and beekeeping projects with very different roles in the city's planning and policy making processes in order to examine the ways gardening produces particular kinds of class and civic relations.

This work concludes by returning to the question of possibilities for nourishing the mutual well-being of humans and nonhumans through gardening and beekeeping. Gardening and

beekeeping provide Elmwoodites with ways to enact care and creativity and to work toward producing environments that prioritize living well together. However, race- and class-based inequalities shape, and are shaped by, these same practices, through differential access to resources and experiences of urban space, varying ideas of who/what ought to be cared for and how, conflicting aesthetic standards for homes and gardens, challenges to sociospatial accessibility, and competing land use and economic development priorities. I conclude this dissertation by reiterating the ways a framework based on understanding gardening as a type of caring, creative material labor used to create particular kinds of urban environments facilitates such an understanding. I suggest too, that this framework encourages us to consider gardening as a form of entanglement, a consideration which makes possible ways of thinking about and practicing gardening that mobilize these entanglements toward the recognition of gardening's embeddedness within politics of race and class, and greater solidarities among those laboring to create more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable forms of urban life.

Chapter 2: Research Among Elmwood's Gardeners

In order to examine the ways gardeners produced environments and class relations, I undertook fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Elmwood, Michigan.¹² Employing a combination of surveys, interviews, and participant observation I worked with both home and community gardeners, as well as beekeepers, to understand how they used gardening and beekeeping to create the kinds of environments in which they wanted to live. Elmwood is a diverse city; it is roughly 60% white residents, 30% African-American residents, with the remaining 10% Latino/a, Asian, or mixed race.¹³ It is also a relatively low-income city; the median income is \$38,289, compared to \$53,889 for the US as whole. This number belies a great deal of internal inequality though, as 22% of the city's households live below the poverty line while 20% have incomes greater than \$100,000 (US Census 2010). This economic inequality is directly related to the city's experiences of deindustrialization. With the closing or reduction in workforce at many of the region's factories, quite a few Elmwoodites lost their jobs over the period 1975–2010. While the health-care, technology, and higher education sectors employ a number of people throughout the region, they have not been able to absorb the number of blue-collar workers laid-off due to deindustrialization, and in fact have attracted a growing number of new middle-class residents to Elmwood and the surrounding area. Of those working-class residents who have remained in the labor market, many have found work in poorly-paid, unstable service sector work, laboring long, irregular hours in Elmwood and surrounding cities' restaurants and large retail stores. Many people also left the area, and this population loss has taken its toll; there are several vacant storefronts in each business district, abandoned homes in the working-class neighborhoods, and

¹² At the time of my research, Elmwood consisted of a city of less than 20,000 people and a surrounding township of approximately 80,000. The township consists of highly urban and suburban areas contiguous to the City of Elmwood, and rural areas complete with farms. While the city and township are different entities, with separate governments and a handful of uniquely specific issues, I treat them unless otherwise indicated as one entity called Elmwood. This follows the common practice of Elmwoodites themselves. While the rural areas of the township were always treated as distinct, the contiguous street grid between the City of Elmwood and portions of Elmwood Township meant that in day-to-day practice the city and the urban township were experienced as one urban area. Elmwoodites made distinctions as necessary, and I follow that convention here.

¹³ As compared to the US, which is 64% white, only 12% African-American, and 15% Latino/a, 5% Asian.

several vacant school buildings because the city's two districts consolidated due to decreased enrollment numbers.

Thus in many ways, daily life in Elmwood was a study in contrasts. My first field journal entry, though tinged with the wide-eyed naiveté of a beginning fieldworker, still rang true after fourteen months of ethnographic research. It was a late September day, and the friend with whom I stayed during my first months of fieldwork asked if I would like to walk with her, her neighbor, and their young children from their homes in Hilltop—a primarily white, middle class neighborhood, full of tree-lined streets and diverse but well-maintained housing stock—to the downtown farmers' market. Eager for the chance to get out and get started with my research, I said yes. Early that afternoon the kids were gathered up and our little party set off. We walked down the hill, passing by large old houses, some clearly home to a single family, others subdivided into apartments that were starting to look quite shabby. Our route led us past the bus station downtown, and as we walked over broken sidewalks I marveled at the juxtapositions unfolding. Our party of relatively well-off white women and children contrasted with the primarily poor and working-class, African-American crowd waiting at the bus station, complete with mothers struggling to control squirming, impatient toddlers. As we rounded the corner to turn away from the station and toward the farmers' market, we moved past a strip club and two vacant bars that had been closed for years. My field notes indicate that I wondered what was going through my friend and her neighbor's minds at this moment. Did they notice the stark changes in their surroundings? The environment shifted again as we reached the edge of the block. A trendy new restaurant had opened on the main street there; it and the surrounding shops were well tended, and there was a bustle of street life as folks made their way among the various establishments—restaurants, a gym, the library, and on that day, the farmers' market. At the market, we bumped into various acquaintances, striking up small conversations amidst the swirl of people attending the market, engaging in the kinds of friendly chance encounters that I came to consider a key part of everyday life in Elmwood.

The walk was clearly jarring for me at the time, the variegated landscape of Elmwood not yet once again part of my everyday (though this particular block was to become, in a couple of months, my home; I rented a loft apartment above the trendy new restaurant). And as I was to learn later, Elmwoodites, my friends included, were not oblivious to these contrasts. Rather they were the very fabric and structure by which they understood and navigated the city. Elmwood is, as our walk suggested, a city of neighborhoods. In large part this is because over the course of its history these neighborhoods, spatially delimited by business districts, major thoroughfares, hills, and rivers, came to take on specific class and racial characteristics. To say that someone was from Maplewood, or Orchard Park, or to tell someone you went down to the Old Yards or up College Street was to communicate not only spatial location, but social location as well. It conveyed one's class, and likely race identifications, and encoded information on who you probably saw and what you probably did in a way that was particular to Elmwood, if not unique in terms of urban life in America.

Thus, the contrasts that characterized daily life within the spatial landscape of Elmwood emerged for many from the two different registers in which this life played out. In one, people were firmly located in their communities, defined typically in terms of one's neighborhood of residence as well as those individuals involved in similar organizations, with similar class backgrounds, racial identifications, political views, and lifestyles.¹⁴ In another register of daily life though, Elmwoodites continually crossed, or at least, registered, the bounds of their various communities as they moved through the social and spatial landscapes of the city—an awareness not easily avoided due to Elmwood's small size and particular history (discussed further in

¹⁴ Community is an amorphous term, both in academic language and in everyday American vernacular. The definition of community expanded and contracted in research participants' use in ways that varied between people and across contexts. Rather than develop a definition of community as it emerged across a multiplicity of individual and situational meanings, I allow the term to float freely in my dissertation, as it did in the everyday talk of Elmwoodites. Community here and throughout the dissertation denotes a sense of connection to others who share in common, but powerful in the ambiguity it creates about who is doing the sharing, and of what. While I attend to the exclusions this usage generates throughout the dissertation, this aspect of the concept of community is not my main focus. Rather, I am more concerned with the fact that research participants have chosen to deploy the term "community" at all, and what they are attempting to achieve in so doing.

Chapter 3). For example, the trip to the farmers' market discussed above required passing through all kinds of disjunctures, like the move from abandoned bars to hip eateries; similarly, to access the interstate for one's daily commute, one had to pass by vacant industrial properties and struggling working-class neighborhoods. While most of these encounters were not significant to Elmwoodites, their ubiquity provided a kind of common metric for residents—how one talked about, or did not talk about, these divisions was a way to assess another's status and social attitudes. Coming to understand the local vernacular by which Elmwood's communities, their differences, and the encounters between them, were talked about and interpreted—such as the significance of neighborhoods—was a key part of my fieldwork process. It also became a key part of my analysis.

In particular, I focus on the ways white, middle-class gardeners in Elmwood understood themselves and their activities, as well as the gardening practices of race and class others, within a context of economic and ecological precarity and social inequality. While white, middle-class Elmwoodites were subject to economic precarity, exemplified in the competing concerns over maintaining property values and affording property taxes, these experiences were arguably tempered by the outsize role of this social group in American culture and politics. From the rise of post-World War II suburbia to the current day (Hayden 2004), from local Elmwood officials to national politicians, the implicitly white, particularly home-owning, middle class are consistently valorized as the core of American society and economy (Heiman 2015; Katz 2008). As a result, white, middle-class Americans play an important part in shaping normative standards, such as those regarding land use, in the United States. For example, Low (2004) demonstrates the ways histories of locating middle-class wealth and economic security in houses, systematic racial exclusion with respect to housing and property-ownership, and contemporary anxieties over economic and class precarity converge in the form of the gated housing community. These communities are intended to materially and symbolically shore-up white, middle-class status through acts of concentration and exclusion. Through their choice of housing (or the participation

in particular kinds of gardening activities) members of this group are able to define themselves in ways that were at once legible to others but not explicitly associated with race and class based differences, while also securing and perpetuating their own ways of life and privileges amidst changing social and economic conditions (Hartigan 1999; Slocum 2007). In the case of gated communities, the physical presence of the gate stokes fears of those kept out, while failing to explicitly name a threat, allowing existing assumptions and cultural patterns—predicated on an association between dark skin color, downward class mobility, and a lack of moral rectitude—to fill this void. In the case of urban gardening in Elmwood, it is the association between white, middle-class—and in this case, socially progressive—residents, particular kinds of eco-friendly gardening practice, and an imagining of Elmwood’s future as a green, creative city, that converge to create and reproduce particular kinds of class distinction and racial difference.

Thus, what ethnographies like Low’s also demonstrate are the importance of studying white, middle-class American life, for the ways members of this social group are able to create and consolidate their status in relation to race and class others (Bourdieu 1984; Liechty 2003), as well as the ways these others come to be defined and understood from the vantage point of white, middle-class authority. In my analysis, I adopt a similar project, seeking to understand the ways white, middle-class gardeners and beekeepers understood themselves and their activities within the context of Elmwood, the conceptions about and exclusions of working-class residents and residents of color these understandings—most often unintentionally—generated, and the imaginings for the future of the city on which they were predicated. However, I also couple this analysis with an investigation, albeit from a limited sample, of gardening among Elmwood’s working-class residents and residents of color. By juxtaposing the experiences of people like Anna, a white, middle-class, eco-conscious gardener and activist, with those of Ms. Dolores, a black, working-class gardener and youth program leader (see Chapter 6), I seek to provide a counternarrative to that which emerges from white, middle-class gardeners’ conceptions of themselves and their activities, and to render legible the absences their dominant narrative

generates. I also seek to draw attention to the points of disjuncture and convergence between these narratives in order to acknowledge the possibilities for more ecologically sustainable and socially equitable forms of urban life Elmwoodites desire and identify in their activities.

In the first section of this chapter, I review the methodological approaches I adopted in this project. I explain the ways I used both neighborhoods and collective group projects (like community gardens) to organize my research and analysis. In so doing, I also address who was, and was not, included in this research project. In the second half of this chapter I engage with my positionality as a researcher. I discuss the ways my race, class, prior relationship to the field site, and research agenda all shaped the ways I conducted my research and related to research participants. No ethnographic rendering is an objective representation of life, and in making explicit my positionality, research agenda, and ethnographic processes, I aim to make legible the frameworks through which I came to experience and interpret life in Elmwood.

Methods

Urban gardening and livestock raising were practices that occurred across various spectrums of demographic difference, including race, class, gender, and age, and gardeners would at times speak of themselves as members of a kind of city-wide group. Much more frequently, however, gardeners and beekeepers defined themselves in the ways most Elmwoodites did, in relation to the neighborhood in which they resided. These neighborhoods, and/or the collective projects gardeners participated in, served as the loci for various communities, gardening or otherwise. Thus, I approached my research methodologically from two angles: that of the neighborhood and that of the collective group project.

Neighborhoods

Prior experience as a youth garden program administrator and preliminary fieldwork during the summers of 2011 and 2012 allowed me to know the ways different neighborhoods were classed

and raced, along with where the community gardens and similar collective alternative agrifood projects, such as the Honeybee Initiative, were located. I began formal field research for this dissertation project in the fall of 2013 by visiting all the community gardens and alternative food projects I could identify, confirming their existence (several were no longer present) and location, and mapping the layout in relation to the surrounding neighborhood (did the garden front the street? Was it associated with a building or another gathering site? Was there foot traffic? Were there other uses occurring in the space?). I also attempted to make contact with a representative of each community garden and conduct a structured interview (Appendix A) in order to ascertain the history, organization, and current activities of the garden in question (Table B.1).

Tabulating the garden's basic characteristics (location, plot allocation system, and membership style) with the garden's willingness to participate in a case study and the surrounding neighborhood's demographic characteristics, I selected five gardens for intensive case study: the Hilltop Community Garden, the Downtown Elmwood Community Garden, the Towerview Community Garden, the Tremont Community Garden, and the Orchard Park Yard and Garden Club (see Appendix B for descriptions of each). The purpose of these case studies was to narrow the population of community gardeners who were possible research participants in a way that maintained fidelity to the diversity of these gardeners and the types of community gardens in the city. Case study methods included interviews with multiple participants, regular participation in community workdays, and observations (Table 2.1). These observations consisted of visiting the garden at different times of day on different days of the week; I would work in the garden tending community spaces like donation beds and walkways, or bring along work, like catching up on field notes. I seldom interacted with gardeners during these observations, as they were rarely in the garden. This time just "hanging out" though, provided several informative interactions with passers-by and thus provided valuable insights into how non-gardening Elmwoodites thought about and interacted with the spaces of these gardens.

Table 2.1 Community Gardener Data

Garden	No. of Interviews	No. of Workdays (approx. 1–3 hrs each)	No. of Observations (approx. 30–60 min each)
Hilltop CG	5	3	1/mo for 6 mos
Downtown CG	2	1	1/mo for 6 mos
Towerview CG	0	2/wk for 6mos	N/A
Tremont CG	1	2/mo for 6mos	N/A
Orchard Park Club	4	2	Monthly meetings for 6 months
	N=12; an additional 12 interviews were conducted with members of other community gardens		

To recruit individuals from within these various community gardening projects I relied on the garden’s Facebook pages, group meetings, and most of all, personal contact to introduce myself, my project, and solicit participation. I first asked gardeners to complete a short ethnographic survey (Appendix A) in order to gather some basic data on demographics, history of gardening experience, and perceived benefits of gardening. I also asked survey-takers if they would be willing to participate in an interview. Those who agreed were followed up with and an ethnographic interview of anywhere from thirty to one-hundred and twenty minutes was conducted (Appendix A). In total I interviewed twenty-four community gardeners.

In order to contextualize these community gardens and gardeners I also included their associated neighborhoods (where appropriate) as part of the case study. These neighborhood case studies included Hilltop, Tremont, and Orchard Park. In addition, I included two neighborhoods—Williams-Bell and High-Oak/Park Heights (technically two different neighborhoods, but often lumped together), which did not have a community garden for comparative purposes. These case studies consisted of attending neighborhood association

meetings (where held), gaining membership to Facebook pages (again, when available), and otherwise attempting to participate in neighborhood events and be aware of specific issues facing residents (Table 2.2). I also visited these neighborhoods on many different occasions, to visit community centers or other institutions, participate in community gardens, or simply to walk around and observe. Through these activities, I was able to interact with various different residents, and carry on casual conversations with non-gardeners. This provided valuable insight into how Elmwoodites who did not garden thought about their city and the role of gardening within it.

Table 2.2 Neighborhood Case Study and Backyard Gardener Data

Neighborhood	No. of Backyard Gardeners Interviewed	Neighborhood Assoc. Meetings	Facebook Group	Other
Hilltop	6	N/A	Yes	2 planning meetings
Tremont	1	6–8	Yes	2 planning meetings 2 clean-up days
Orchard Park	N/A (all garden club members were backyard gardeners)	1	No	
Williams-Bell	2	1	N/A	4 monthly community meetings 4 community center fitness classes
High-Oaks/Park Heights	6	N/A	Yes	
	N=15; (an additional 5 backyard gardeners from other neighborhoods were interviewed)			

Many Elmwoodites gardened and kept livestock, but did not do so as part of a collective project like a community garden. My neighborhood case studies thus also provided an opportunity to identify these individuals. At neighborhood association meetings, on Facebook pages, and at community events I introduced myself and my project, and asked for participation in my survey. As with the community garden case studies, these surveys provided basic data and served to recruit interview participants (N=20 backyard gardeners; Table 2.2). Also like the community garden case studies, the successful recruitment of participants varied extensively from neighborhood to neighborhood. Those neighborhoods with active Facebook pages or neighborhood associations, and a spirit of community life (Hilltop, Orchard Park, and Tremont) were much easier to recruit participants from than those without (High-Oaks and Williams-Bell). This imbalance is particularly significant as regards the Williams-Bell neighborhood, one of Elmwood's majority African-American neighborhoods. Here, attempts to recruit participants were also made more challenging by racial differences (as I am white). There is thus a disproportionately low number of African-American gardeners represented in my study sample. This underrepresentation mirrors the underrepresentation of Elmwood's black community in the city's collective life and politics, and the underrepresentation of black gardeners in alternative agrifood scholarship. Consequently, I attempt to use this imbalance as an opportunity to interrogate the ongoing reproduction of racial inequality in Elmwood and in scholarly knowledge regarding black urban gardeners. Based on my limited sample, I ask what aspects of gardening and community life serve to distinguish black gardeners, and what role these differences play in the reproduction of race-based inequalities. I also ask how these experiences differ from the various narratives (or lack of narratives) about black gardeners and city residents advanced by white, middle-class gardeners and Elmwoodites.

In addition to this neighborhood based approach, I also recruited community and backyard gardeners and beekeepers through snowball sampling. Several of the gardeners I interviewed knew and put me in touch with friends who also gardened. Through the course of my

participation in various alternative food projects, organizations, and in general city life, I met with and talked to many people, some of whom were gardeners. There was in general much interest and enthusiasm for my project, and these casual encounters often provided another means to recruit survey takers and interview participants. For example, one Hilltop gardener and supporter of my project took the liberty of cross-posting my call for survey participants to the adjacent neighborhood’s Facebook group. Another time a casual chat in the bar generated a list of nearly a dozen potential contacts. As a result of the somewhat random nature of this recruitment, a number of the community and backyard gardeners and beekeepers participating in this project came from other neighborhoods throughout the city and township, providing a broader perspective and additional insights.

Finally, I interviewed a number of people who were not gardeners (N=28). Most of these people were government officials and organization leaders whose work brought them into contact with gardeners in Elmwood. Only eight interviewees had no direct personal or professional involvement in gardening. Thus, for this project I interviewed seventy-two individuals; twenty-four community gardeners, twenty backyard gardeners, and twenty-eight non-gardeners (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Interviewee Characteristics

Community Gardeners	Backyard Gardeners	Non-gardeners
24	20	28 (20 with professional connection to gardening; 8 with no connection to gardening)

Reflecting the general trend of urban gardening and beekeeping as a primarily white, middle class practice in the contemporary United States, and the ways in which my data collection skewed toward white, middle class participants, the majority of gardeners participating in my project were white and middle class (85% of gardening interviewees were white, 70% were

middle class, and 65% were both white and middle class). I attempt to make these biases clear in my writing, using this make-up to ground my analysis in the ways white, middle-class Elmwoodites engaged in gardening as caring and creative labor, while addressing where possible and relevant the reasons why rates of gardening and research participation were lower among working class Elmwoodites and Elmwoodites of color, as well as what kinds of understandings about their gardening activities they held themselves. Likewise, I should note that while eight percent of the population of Elmwood is Latino and two percent Asian, with a growing number of Arab-speaking residents as well, these demographics are not represented in my sample. While I attempted to contact members of these communities, I was unsuccessful, due to a combination of the factors discussed above and unsuccessful connections with key informants. There are no doubt a number of avid gardeners in these communities, and I heard several anecdotes that would seem to confirm this, but members are not active participants in the various forms of community life (community gardening projects, neighborhood associations, Facebook pages) that I used to access potential research participants. This is no doubt a direct result of their racial and ethnic identities, in particular the intense precarity and discrimination surrounding Latino residents in the US.

Finally, I found that well-educated white gardeners were much easier to recruit and more willing participants. Drawing from conversations I had with these individuals, I surmise that this was in large part due to both our shared positionalities and their familiarity with research protocols. In contrast, working class gardeners and gardeners of color were less likely to participate in my survey, less likely to return it, and much more reluctant to participate in a formal interview. There are likely many different reasons for this, including what I perceived as discomfort with our different race and class identifications, confusion about research protocols, and a lack of time. I was however, able to cultivate relationships with several working-class gardeners and gardeners of color and gather data over the course of many casual conversations and shared labor in gardens. I was much less likely to form such relationships with white

gardeners, as there were fewer opportunities for collective labor. For example, though few Tremont Community Garden members agreed to be interviewed, I spent a considerable amount of time getting to know these gardeners through our regular workdays together; while half of the Hilltop community gardeners agreed to an interview, I rarely had the chance to garden with them. Thus, the ways in which I gathered data, and the data itself, varied in ways directly related to gardeners' race and class identifications. These variations occurred both in the ways people related and connected to me and in the opportunities for collective gardening labor that presented themselves. I try to make these variances clear and account for these differences of relationship in my analysis.

Collective Projects

In addition to case studies organized around specific gardens and neighborhoods, I also participated with varying degrees of formality in different alternative agrifood organizations that served Elmwood and/or the wider area. There are a variety of such organizations, ranging from farmers' markets to cooperative food production and sales to interest groups. I made an attempt to visit each of these organizations at least once, at a meeting or other public gathering, and to speak either formally or informally with leaders and general members. To gain a better understanding of what organizational life among alternative agrifood practitioners was like, I participated more intensively in five different collective projects: the two Elmwood farmers' markets, the Elmwood County Food Policy Council, the Cooperative Orchard & Garden Project (COGP), the Honeybee Initiative, and the permaculture¹⁵ interest group Permaculture Everything! (PE) (Table 2.4; see

¹⁵ Permaculture refers to an approach to agricultural, infrastructural, and social design that seeks to mimic ecological systems. Key principles include a prioritization of "closed-loop" systems wherein nothing is wasted and the belief that everything is, directly or indirectly, useful. For example, permaculturalists were fond of saying "nothing is a weed." When applied to gardening, permaculture principles were typically enacted through a favoring of perennial plants, companion and complementary planting techniques, and an emphasis on composting. In their attempts to mimic nature, permaculture-style gardens regularly featured tall plants, unkempt growing patterns, and the presence of plants often indexed as weeds (e.g. milkweed, Jerusalem artichoke, goldenrod, etc.). Specific types of permaculture land use included hugelkultur, food

Appendix D for descriptions of each). These were selected to represent the range of different groups in Elmwood, the degree to which their activities were of interest to the central themes and questions of this research project, and the ease by which I was able to enter the group and begin participating.¹⁶ I also found that many of these organizations had significant overlap in their participants, making further engagement on my part somewhat redundant.

Table 2.4 Collective Project Participation

Project	Form of Participation	Amount of Participation
Farmers' Markets	Patron	Weekly attendance at Tuesday market; monthly attendance at Saturday market
Elmwood Co. Food Policy Council	Observer	2 full council meetings; 2 zoning subcommittee meetings; Google Group member
Cooperative Orchard & Garden Project	Volunteer	2 group workdays; 2 individual visits; 1 organizational meeting; Facebook group member
Honeybee Initiative	Volunteer	1 hive check; 1 orientation; 2 festivals (as volunteer); Google Calendar member
Permaculture Everything!	Member	≈6 monthly meetings; 1 workday; 2 workshops; Facebook group member

forests, rain gardens, and pollinator habitat. Practitioners can receive formal design training and certification, though few of the gardeners with whom I spoke in Elmwood had done so. Nor did most seek to implement permaculture principles in any orthodox sort of way. Rather, they drew inspiration from the philosophy of permaculture and adopted techniques as it suited them. Thus I refer throughout the dissertation primarily to “permaculture-style” or “wild” gardens.

¹⁶ Groups had varying degrees of cliquishness which resulted in differential access. Farmers’ markets and other sites of commerce were the easiest to participate in, given the desire for broad public participation to generate revenue. Policy focused groups had a higher threshold for entry (knowing when and where) and could be intimidating given their specific focus and agenda and the very obvious personal relationships operating, but were in principle also open to the public. Other groups were much more variant: PE was relatively easy to enter as a stranger, but the Honeybee Initiative would have been very difficult to join without prior relationships to members.

Alternative agrifood practitioners did not just engage with alternative agrifood organizations, but lived in Elmwood and participated in the life of the city. I too resided in Elmwood, in an apartment downtown,¹⁷ and made an effort to participate in community life. This consisted of doing as much of my routine activities and shopping in the city as possible. I exercised at the studio below my apartment, shopped at the co-op or the Latino grocery store down the block from me, in addition to regular trips to the Kroger across the freeway, and frequented a variety of restaurants and cafes. While I developed my own daily routes and regular places, I made an effort to visit at least once a variety of establishments: the “poor” or “black” Kroger,¹⁸ the coney island,¹⁹ the Korean restaurant, the West African market, and so on. I also participated in as many community events or summer festivals, of which there were quite a few

¹⁷ When I initially arrived in Elmwood I rented a room in a friend’s house in Hilltop. When my husband joined me in January we needed a bigger place, and the experience of apartment hunting in Elmwood was illuminating. It helped orient me to the different character of each neighborhood and showed me the challenges facing renters in the city. We could not afford to live in a large apartment or house in one of the middle-class neighborhoods, and smaller, more affordable apartments in these neighborhoods were very few. These types of apartments were concentrated in complexes on the outskirts of the city, or in deteriorated housing at the core, often referred to as “ghetto housing.” While we considered renting a home in Tremont or Williams-Bell, the rents on these homes, due to real estate speculation and the distorting effects of Section 8 in the city (discussed in Chapter 2), were on the pricey end of our budget range (\$1000/mo or less), or higher. We eventually settled on a downtown loft for a number of reasons. These apartments were more expensive than “ghetto housing,” but were of higher quality and safer (break-ins were very common in core neighborhoods). While the apartment complexes and Tremont/Williams-Bell housing did not have quite as high a crime rate, they were difficult to commute from. Downtown housing was centrally located, making it easier for me to get around my fieldsite. While this housing came with a degree of class status (though my husband and I joked that it was the only time we would be able to afford living in a “downtown loft”), it did not have any of the other particular markers and insulating effects that came with each different neighborhood. It was thus a relatively ideal and comfortable location for us and our two cats.

¹⁸ Like most US cities, Elmwood had multiple grocery stores from the same chain, with different atmospheres, selections, and local racial/class codings based on location. In this case, the only two grocery stores nearby (not in the City proper, but just outside in the township) were from the same chain. One, located in the more affluent business district of the township, was large, well-lit, with a wide variety of products, particularly organic food and ethnic sections. It was the most conveniently located Kroger for me, and so I did the bulk of my supermarket shopping there. However, the other Kroger was located in the working-class township business district, and I visited this store several times during my field research. While locals who did not regularly shop there decried it as the “poor,” “dirty,” “black,” or simply “bad” Kroger, I did not find it to be such a terrible experience. It was smaller, more dimly lit, clearly older. The selection was less, and items were clearly curated for a lower-income clientele (e.g. there was not gourmet coffee). However, it reminded me of the small supermarkets of my childhood and I found the clientele to be very friendly, and always had an enjoyable experience there.

¹⁹ The coney dog is a regional delicacy, consisting of a hotdog topped with chili, mustard, and onions, with various sub-regional twists. Coney islands or coney stands are a common feature in most cities in southern Michigan. Some are truly just stands serving coney dogs, while others (such as the one I frequented) are more diner like, serving the traditional range of greasy fastfood and Greek specialties.

ranging from celebrations of Volkswagen automobiles to Michigan craft beer. These were always very entertaining and a great source of excitement and communal sentiment in the city.

Another source of communal sentiment was the annual citywide beautification day. Every May various organizations, in concert with the city, organized teams, acquired flowers and mulch, and deployed to various public spaces across the city to clear away detritus and plant flowers. Known as Elmwood Pride, this clean-up day is particularly important to community gardens, who frequently use it as a chance to work as a group clearing pathways, borders, and other shared spaces. I participated in two Elmwood Pride sites—the Tremont Community Resource Center and the Community Park Community Garden.

In contrast to this planned event, several spur-of-the-moment clean-up days were also organized. The year I was in Elmwood was a record-breaking harsh winter. Below a certain temperature salt does not melt ice, and large, misshapen sheets soon coated the downtown sidewalks and crosswalks. Several clean-up days were declared by the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) in order to bring people together, armed with shovels and pick-axes, to break away the ice. Once the several feet of snow began to melt in March, a great deal of trash was revealed, and another clean-up day sponsored by the DDA was held to pick up trash in the city's business districts. I participated in or observed each of these impromptu workdays.

As a final form of participating in community life, my husband and I rented a community garden plot. I did not formally conduct research at the Central Elmwood Community Garden, though my experiences there inform this work. Rather, it was a chance for me to better understand what it was like to be a community gardener unfettered (as much as possible) from the research experience, and for my husband and I to have some space to grow veggies and socialize. This was without a doubt one of the richer and more rewarding (in both tasty produce and relationships) experiences of our lives in Elmwood.

I also made an effort to observe political life in the Elmwood. Like many small cities, some of the most important debates over local politics occurred outside city hall, at the farmers'

markets, in the bars and restaurants, and on online comment threads. Nevertheless, formal political meetings were an important opportunity to observe how issues in the city were discursively constructed by elites and the degree to which these processes were engaged in by ordinary residents. Thus, I attended numerous city council (N=10), planning commission (N=4), and DDA (N=4) meetings during my field work. I also attended several Township Board meetings (N=3). Public attendance and participation at these meetings was always low, unless a controversial topic, such as opening another marijuana dispensary or approving changes to the zoning code, was on the docket. In addition to these meetings, I attended any special hearings or listening sessions (N=5) being held in relation to gardening, urban land use, and/or economic development priorities; several of these were organized in connection with the master plan, adopting a form-based zoning code, and approving the Clayborne affordable housing development. These events were particularly illuminating (and play a key role in the analysis of Chapter 6) of the ways issues of race, class, and the future of the city were talked about and contested among the city's populace.

On Being a Researcher and Doing Ethnography Among Elmwood's Gardeners

Before proceeding to an ethnographic analysis of the ways Elmwoodites used gardening to imagine and enact various possibilities for their households, communities, and environments within the city, it is necessary to position myself within the social and spatial landscape presented above. I did not move through Elmwood as an unmarked person, an invisible observer or objective analyst. I brought to Elmwood and to this research project my own identity and research agenda and these both shaped my experiences, my relationships with gardeners, and the analysis that follows.

Like many of the participants in this research study, I and my family have experienced class mobility, though in my case it has always been upward. Both my parents grew up in working class families and communities, though I grew up in a fairly secure middle-class

household in a predominantly working-class city. Through higher education—much emphasized by my parents—and later marriage I continued this trajectory of upward class mobility, and find myself in what I, as a researcher of class in the United States, would characterize as upper-middle class. Thus, I came to Elmwood with an intimate knowledge of class mobility, the diverse trajectories it can take, and the painful processes of transformation and loss that often accompany it (Steedman 1986), coupled with a sense of marked class distinction from many of the gardeners with whom I spoke and labored.

I am also white, and in a city and country as racially divided as Elmwood and the United States, this mattered a great deal to the conduct of my research. As other researchers have pointed out, the spaces of alternative agrifood practice are quite frequently white spaces (Alkon 2012; Slocum 2007), and thus my racial identity provided me with an ease of access and movement in many of the key sites of my field research. Not all alternative agrifood practitioners are white, however, and my whiteness undoubtedly made identifying gardeners of color and building relationships with them more difficult. For example, when attending neighborhood meetings in predominantly white neighborhoods I could sit among the attendees relatively unmarked, observing and listening and gauging the right moment in which to identify myself. At neighborhood meetings and other such gatherings in predominantly black neighborhoods, however, my physical presence was immediately noted, requiring an explanation of myself and my research at the outset, often setting up a much more formal dynamic that impeded the types of casual interactions at the core of ethnographic fieldwork.

My race also surely impacted the relationships that I did form. A shared racial identity with white gardeners enabled us to set aside a source of social and interpersonal tension while simultaneously creating a perceived “safe space” in which to discuss issues of race. While no informant ever explicitly articulated this, the numerous moments of conversation about race that emerged in my interview with white gardeners, coupled with the dearth of candid talk of class, suggests this to be case. Meanwhile in my relationships with black gardeners, race (as well as

class) was quite rarely discussed. I can only surmise that they felt as uncomfortable elaborating on racial issues as I did in pressing them for more information. In handling discussions of race delicately, and allowing any conversations about race to unfold naturally, I was able to better follow the contours of how people talked about difference in their everyday lives, within and between groups. However, because I am white, this unfolding occurred from a particular perspective—how white Elmwoodites talked about race within-group and how black Elmwoodites talked about race between-group. Thus, I operationalize the understandings of race gathered in this fashion in order to consider the production of race-based difference and absence primarily with respect to the experiences and narratives of white, middle-class gardeners.

My gender also impacted my research in specific ways. I did not find in my personal relationships with gardeners any perceivable impact from my identity as a heterosexual, cis-gender woman. Where I perceived the relevance of my gender was in my ability to participate in public and street life, traditionally key aspects of urban ethnography (Low 2000; Whyte 1993). Like most American cities, Elmwood had quite a few cat-callers and while my experience of street harassment was always quite mild, it made me uncomfortable and the street a hostile place. Similarly, I was uneasy about approaching unknown men alone, and thus, rarely struck up conversations with them at places like social gatherings, public hearings, or the line at the local cafe. I did not linger alone in parks or visit unknown bars, and myriad other small actions that undoubtedly shaped my experience of public space and life in Elmwood and foreclosed certain lines of ethnographic analysis (see also Mott and Roberts 2013).

In addition to my identity as a white, upper-middle class woman, my own personal history with Elmwood profoundly shaped my research. I first came to the Elmwood area in 2008 as a recent college graduate and new employee for a local non-profit called Sowing Change. The mission of this organization was, and still is, to improve people's access to gardening and healthy food, which they accomplish through managing the Elmwood farmers' markets, running numerous educational programs for youth and adults, and offering various other kinds of support

for home and community gardeners. Through my position as a youth programming coordinator and administrator for this organization I became familiar with the many different facets of urban agriculture in the city, as well as some of the community's leaders and key issues facing the city as I developed and implemented various kinds of after-school and summer garden-based programming. After a year and a half of this work I returned to school to begin work on my PhD, but my experiences with Elmwood gardeners stuck with me and became the basis for developing the research project that culminated in this work.

My prior experience as a member of the gardening community in Elmwood was of great benefit, allowing me to re-enter this community as a researcher fairly easily. I already had long-standing relationships with certain key informants, knew where the community gardens were, and what organizations were of particular importance. But this experience was also a hindrance as those in Elmwood had prior relationships and perceptions of me. Those who knew me often made assumptions about what I knew and where I stood on certain issues. Those who did not used my work in the community with Sowing Change to position me within their fields of known people and organizations. As a way to contribute to the gardening community of Elmwood, and to provide me with a degree of institutional legitimacy within this community, I affiliated with Sowing Change as a volunteer researcher; in exchange for performing two program evaluations I would be able to use an affiliation with the organization to introduce myself and my doctoral research project. Introducing myself as someone connected to Sowing Change made me legible in ways my University of Kentucky affiliation did not, and often did open doors in making contact with potential participants and legitimize my presence at community meetings. At the same time, using this affiliation brought a host of assumptions about what I hoped to accomplish through my research and relationships, primarily that I supported the work of Sowing Change (which I often did, but not always). I did not always use this affiliation in my introductions to people and organizations, and at times downplayed the connection, in an attempt to be judicious about how I presented myself to the community and keep open relationships to those parties that did not

interpret Sowing Change's work as entirely beneficent.²⁰ Due to my prior experience in Elmwood I too had a set of preconceived notions about residents, and had to work continually to disrupt my own assumptions about who people were, why they did what they did, and what opinions and practices they held.

In addition to my positionality, my fieldwork in Elmwood was influenced by my own research agenda. I began this project as a proponent of urban gardening, and while some of my positions on issues, like the appropriateness of hoopouses in urban settings, have changed as a direct result of conducting this research, I remain a resolute advocate for growing food, raising livestock, and otherwise cultivating relationships in urban contexts with the non-human beings on which our own lives rely. I am also a staunch environmentalist, deeply concerned about the relationship of humanity to the ecosystems we inhabit and the ways climate change will impact our social and ecological lives. Together these two positions have pushed me to conduct research and produce ethnography that is not merely descriptive, but advocates for ways of living that can make sustainable, pleasurable, and equitable forms of urban life possible.

In particular, I take inspiration and guidance from the work of feminist anthropologists, such as Zora Neale Hurston, Vera Green, and Katherine Dunham, whose work not only engaged with issues of inequality and exploitation, but understood that engagement to be coming from a place of embodied experience as they sought to add a deeper and more nuanced dimension to the theorization of gender and race through their position as black women (Bolles 2001, 2013). What the work of these women, and many other feminist activists and anthropologists (e.g. Bunch and

²⁰ While Sowing Change had widespread support for their work in Elmwood, it was not universal. Certain decisions, activities, and personalities within the organization inspired a degree of controversy. In an effort to respect the confidentiality of research participants, and the trust they displayed in sharing their experiences and relationships with Sowing Change, both good and bad, I do not discuss these controversies at any length in this dissertation, unless directly relevant to my arguments. In so doing I am also trying to keep the activities of individual people and households front and center. Sowing Change played an outsized role in the alternative agrifood community in Elmwood, and I cannot proceed with my dissertation analysis without attending to the work they did. That said, this is not intended to be an ethnography of this organization, and by backgrounding Sowing Change whenever possible and appropriate I hope to maintain a sense of balance wherein the experiences of people, regardless of the institutions they may or may not be embedded in, are the primary analytic focus.

Reid 1972; Behar and Gordon 1995; Combahee River Collective 1977; MacCormack and Strathern 1980; Mohanty 2003; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974) makes clear is that for them anthropological research was always already political because they themselves, as embodied and racialized women, were political subjects; the two could not be disentangled. Likewise, I am a classed, racialized, gendered subject enmeshed in an array of political relations with my own particular ideas about how these relations should be reproduced or transformed. Rather than aver this positionality or allow it to derail my research, I have chosen to follow the example of these women and use my positionality and political subjectivity to motivate research that is (I hope) theoretically driven and productive, but also deeply engaged with the very real problems of social and economic inequality shaping urban gardening in Elmwoodites' everyday lives.

This understanding of myself as a researcher, and the purpose of my research, led me to draw on the conceptualization of engaged anthropology put forward by Low and Merry (2010; see also Lamphere 2004) to frame the purpose and conduct of this research project, as well as the relationship of this research to project participants. Engaged anthropology starts from the premise that all research produces results that impact researched communities, and should thus begin with a consideration of the terms of that inevitable engagement. As such, engaged anthropological research, regardless of whether the goal is to further theoretical development or craft policy solutions, strives to be conceived and implemented in some degree of dialogue between researcher and subject, with results that speak to the questions and concerns of those studied as well as the anthropological academy. By approaching my dissertation fieldwork as a form of engaged anthropology, I was able to think through my own research agenda in dialogue with research participants, taking seriously their own motivations for gardening and their goals for my research project.

In this regard my positionality was an aid, helping me to approach this ethnographic research, following Borneman and Hammoudi (2009), as a tool for the co-production of knowledge about gardening and urban life. Elmwood as a city—its arrangements of space, social

relationships including inequalities based on differences of class and race, economic relations, and political governance—is continually produced as these various dimensions intersect with and operate alongside one another. Gardening, both historically and contemporarily, has been fully embedded within these processes. By coming to this project as a researcher already entangled in the history and life of the city, and by acknowledging and embracing these entanglements, I was able to produce along with research participants an ethnography that positions gardening in relation to the communities and ecosystems of Elmwood in ways that I could not have anticipated or identified on my own. For example, the analytic of care did not feature in the framing of this research project, but emerged through my conversations with and labor alongside Elmwoodites, who were themselves striving to understand the complex processes shaping life in their city, their place within them, and how they might engage in these processes on their own terms, toward their own ends.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the ways care was enacted through gardening in Elmwood, it is necessary to trace another dimension of my, and Elmwoodites', relation to the city—its history. For all it shares with deindustrial America, Elmwood is a unique place. A small city, it is also vibrantly diverse, with a striking amount of gardening, and public conversation about the role of gardening in the city's future, going on. All these characteristics are a product of the city's unique history, the ways it experienced industrialization and the emergence of a regional postindustrial economy, as well as the ways certain Elmwoodites' histories were elided in the narrative that dominated public discourse in the city. It is to these histories—both hidden and explicit—that I now turn.

Chapter 3: Chickens, Migrants, and Segregation: Histories of Elmwood

Urban histories, like urban anthropological studies, have focused for the most part on large cities. The stories of industrialization, the Great Migration, and deindustrialization are largely located in major metropolises, like Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, and New York (see for example Burgess 1925; Hamer 2011; Sugrue 1996; Wilson 2012), as are studies of Rust Belt urban revitalization (Cooper 1999; Rich 2013; Smith 1996; Teaford 1990). Yet scattered throughout the Rust Belt are numerous small cities, like Elmwood, whose histories have been profoundly shaped by these social and economic changes, and whose experiences are uniquely affected by their existence as *small cities*. Due to its size, Elmwood had relatively little economic diversity to fall back on when the city's factories began to downsize and close; while never a company town, by 1970 many residents had come to rely directly or indirectly on industrial labor. Elmwood's small size has also impacted social life in the city. While clearly divided into neighborhoods with specific racial and class characteristics, at roughly four square miles it continues to be difficult to live in isolation from those different than oneself.²¹ In focusing on life in Elmwood, I seek to bring to light the particular experiences of small city-dwellers all too often neglected in studies that focus on large-scale cities and metropolitan areas. In so doing, I also seek to invert usual approaches to urban redevelopment and revitalization, where strategies are developed in the context of large metropolises and then retrofitted to smaller scales. A growing literature, reviewed by Rich (2013), addresses the shortcomings of big-city solutions for small, Rust Belt cities. By investigating the organic ways Elmwoodites came to care for their city and to go about creating the kinds of environments and urban life they desired, I suggest ways small cities generate their own revitalization strategies, explore some of the ways these intersect with the widespread use of creative class approaches, and consider what these dynamics hold for the future of Rust Belt cities of all sizes.

²¹ Small cities are typically defined as those with a population of less than 100,000 residents. For a review of the ways small cities are unique from their larger counterparts, see Rich 2013.

I also seek, in this chapter, to extend this focus on those stories subsumed or erased by more dominant narratives to my approach to Elmwood's history. Due to its small size and the ease with which its experience can be collapsed into that of Detroit, there are few academic texts which address the history of Elmwood. I relied for a good part of my information on two local historians, as well as information from the local historical society and several boosterish volumes.²² I recall sitting in the city's archives with Rose, a local history buff, asking her for good sources and references regarding Elmwood's history. She pointed me to a couple canonical texts from the early twentieth century, adding the caveat that they were of the "great man" theory of history and not in keeping with her own feminist ideas. This prompted Rose to reflect on the lack of historical texts that represented life in Elmwood as it was for ordinary people, in all their diversity. For example, she said she had no idea Elmwood was a segregated city until she started looking in the archives and found the research of an African-American librarian who collected numerous oral histories among the city's black residents. But of course it was segregated, she added, just no one ever talked about it. No one, including herself, had questioned why most of the city's African-American population lived south of Main Street.

Like Rose poking around the City Archives, I pieced together the narratives of Elmwood's history that follow through conversations with a wide-ranging group of people, from local historians to neighborhood elders to diverse gardeners with their own personal histories and experiences. In so doing I labored, like Rose, to understand Elmwood's history as it was lived by ordinary people. Building on Wolf's (1982; see also Schneider and Rapp 1995) anthropological approach to history, I also worked to understand Elmwood's past as the product of human relations, realized not only by great men doing grand things, but even more so in the mundane realities of everyday life—relations whose effects continue to play out in Elmwood and its inhabitants' lives, shaping their relations and the histories they continue to produce. While the history of Elmwood can be told through the lives of "great men" and abstract processes, it can

²² I do not cite these historians or works here in order to maintain the anonymity of the fieldsite.

also be rendered through the experiences of ordinary city-dwellers and their relationships to one another and to various institutions. Just as this dissertation presents an understanding of gardening based on the quotidian relations of care and acts of creativity that comprise it, so too I embed those practices in an historical context centered on the ordinary, relational, and otherwise “hidden” experiences of Elmwoodites past. The knowledge of these experiences is important, because while hidden, they are not irrelevant. They had quite “visible” impacts on contemporary life in Elmwood, such as they ways different class histories shaped attitudes toward gardening and beekeeping with respect to land use and economic development policy explored in Chapter 6. Thus, this chapter works to elucidate these histories so that their effect on current-day gardeners and beekeepers might be understood and engaged.

I begin by locating the origins of Elmwood not in white settlement, but in the comings, goings, and inhabitations of the various Native American groups that occupied the land prior to Europeans. I then trace the story of Elmwood’s first century (1830–1930) through a focus on the city’s racial diversity, paying specific attention to the role of Elmwood as an African-American city. Industrialization began in Elmwood around 1930, and I examine this historical process through the perspectives of the Elmwoodites who found themselves hosts to automobile factories and the laborers who made them productive, focusing specifically on the experience of migrants from the American South. Before turning to the subsequent processes of deindustrialization, I turn to consider the history of black Elmwood from 1930 onward, as the experiences of the city’s African-American community, following segregation, diverged from that of other groups in Elmwood in a few key ways. Following a discussion of the long, slow process of deindustrialization (1970–2010) and its effects on life in the city, I pause to consider the histories of Elmwood’s nonhuman inhabitants, primarily chickens and orchards, before concluding with an exploration of Elmwood on the verge of a postindustrial future.

The Old Sauk Trail: Native American Origins of Elmwood

The earliest inhabitants of the land that was to become Elmwood, according to historical and archeological record, were several different Native American groups, with the area eventually becoming known as Potawatomi territory. These peoples were ostensibly drawn by the rich soils in the area and the lands' proximity to the historic Sauk Trail, an important Native American thoroughfare and game hunting trail that ran from the Mississippi River in current-day Illinois through present-day Indiana and Michigan, ending at Lake Huron. Though a Potawatomi area, Ottawa, Ojibwa, and Wyandot groups, along with those that preceded them, also lived, hunted, farmed, and buried their dead throughout this region. White settlement in this bustling area began in the early nineteenth century with outposts established by French and English fur traders. The Native inhabitants, primarily the Wyandot and Potawatomi, were involved in the various conflicts between the French, English, and Americans in the region during the 1700s. They allied with the French against the British in the French and Indian War (1755-1763), with Native groups in Ohio against the Americans in the Northwest Indian War (1785-1795), and with the British against the Americans in the War of 1812. While most Native Americans were forcibly relocated, ultimately to Oklahoma, by the 1830s, a band of Potawatomi remained and today comprise the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi.

The village of Elmwood was officially incorporated in the mid-1800s, settled primarily by white farmers and traders migrating west through Detroit into the Michigan Territory. Following the city's founding, much of the area's Native American history was forgotten in an all too familiar act of colonial erasure, and continues to remain absent from most of the popular discussion of Elmwood's history. The settlement grew into a small city, and continued its role as a key transportation node in the region. Roadways and then railways, and eventually Detroit's suburban streetcar network, all passed through the city. This strategic geographic location drove the city's economic development, and by the end of the nineteenth century Elmwood was known as a small, affluent town. Its role as transportation node also benefited the orchards and other

agricultural enterprises cultivated in the rich soils just outside of town (in what is now Elmwood Township). While popular histories of Elmwood emphasize its historic role as a transport center, and use that history, coupled to its role in producing automobiles, to create a coherent historical narrative that grounds visions of a green, entrepreneurial future, this legacy is never extended past 1830 to include the Native American groups for whom the area was also a significant transit hub.

In addition to transit, the city's economy relied on a well-regarded college and several light industries. To the north, bordering the business district (known as Old Yards) that emerged next to the train station and railway depot, were several mills that powered grain processing and the manufacture of cotton undergarments. The city's industrial district sprang up on the low-lying lands in the center of town, neighboring the Downtown business district. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this district housed everything from woodworking factories to a foundry to a poultry processor.

Elmwood as a Black City, 1830–1930

During the nineteenth century Elmwood was also home to a relatively large and thriving African-American population. Among the city's first non-Native American inhabitants were white abolitionists from New York and New England and free African-Americans. As a result, the city developed a reputation for tolerance toward black residents and the African-American population grew. From its founding to the late-1800s, Elmwood was not fully segregated, with black residents residing in several neighborhoods throughout the city and owning businesses within the core business districts. Given its reputation and close proximity to Canada, the city became an important stop on the Underground Railroad and with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 began sending many more African-Americans, including fearful Elmwood residents, to sister communities there.

Historical records indicate that throughout the nineteenth century, Elmwood's black community was a vibrant one. Newspaper articles are littered with references to various social

and educational events, including well-attended lectures by prominent African-American figures like Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth. Another local history buff, Alfred, has documented several fraternal and sororal organizations, as well as influential chapters of national political organizations such as the National Afro-American League. Numerous churches and civic organizations also contributed to a thriving black populace. The city's Emancipation Day²³ celebrations frequently drew hundreds to thousands of visitors from the surrounding region and throughout the Midwest. Though Elmwood was by no means a racially equitable city, in many ways it was a strikingly diverse and welcoming place where the black community featured prominently in the life of city.

Racial tolerance in Elmwood began to ebb after the Civil War, following nationwide trends of reactionary responses among whites to Emancipation and the influx of new black residents in the decades that followed (Richardson 2004). By the early twentieth century the city was *de facto* fully segregated. As one elder African-American gentleman who remembered this time said, there weren't any signs, but everyone knew—it was a “silent segregation.” In response, the black community consolidated on the south side of town, where the majority of households and institutions were located. There African-American schools, churches, civic organizations, and a bustling business district on Williams Street flourished.

As Rose noted during our conversation in the city archives, this history of segregation and the growth of the Williams-Bell neighborhood are absent from official histories of Elmwood (as is the forced removal of the area's Native American inhabitants), and with them, the history of black Elmwood prior to segregation. Consequently, the sense that Elmwood is a black city, with a long history of African-American settlement and a deeply significant social and cultural legacy, remain hidden, unknown by many contemporary white, and even black, Elmwoodites. Attending

²³ Emancipation Day was celebrated on August 1, in commemoration of the freeing of slaves within the British Empire. Its celebration was specific to the area, reflecting close ties among Elmwood's black community and Canada. In fact, many regional celebrants would have been drawn from across the international border.

a gathering to collect African-American's oral histories organized by Alfred, I heard several elder black Elmwoodites who remembered segregation malign the absence of their community from the city's official history. "Where were we?" asked one woman, rhetorically. Given the ongoing absence of black Elmwoodites from the city's popular history of itself, she might also ask, "where are we?" Bitterness over this historical erasure and the racism it emerged from, however, was coupled in these elders' narratives with nostalgia for a time when, though segregated, the community could be said to be close-knit and thriving (see Boyd 2008). Those gathered that day reminisced fondly about favored soda counters and hangout spots, and expressed gratitude for the black civic institutions and community ethos that looked after them as children and young adults. "Gave it away. No one went hungry," said one man, when I jumped in to ask what the neighborhood's numerous vegetable gardeners and chicken keepers did with their extra produce. Though segregated, Elmwood's black community remained a strong, flourishing, and vital part of the city. And in many ways, Elmwood continued to be an African-American city after 1930, if one that existed in an increasingly unequal and disjointed relationship to a majority white Elmwood.

The South Comes North: Industrialization in Elmwood, 1930–1970

If *de facto* segregation served to further the divergence in black and white Elmwoodites' social and civic histories—though in ways that kept these two communities intimately bound to one another—the processes of industrialization insured that their economic histories would provide a continuing shared narrative. For, across the racial divide, both black and white Elmwoodites considered themselves relatively staid and well-to-do in comparison with their regional peers, a state of affairs that underwent dramatic change beginning in the 1930s. Throughout southeastern Michigan automobile factories were being built, and full-scale industrialization began in Elmwood with the construction of a manufacturing plant just south of the industrial district. Another factory was constructed in Elmwood Township during World War II for defense

manufacturing, and was converted into an automobile production facility after the war. In the 1950s a third plant was constructed, in Elmwood Township. These factories, and the many others that sprang up across southeastern Michigan from 1920–1960, required workers and with their growth came an influx of new residents. During this forty-year period Elmwood’s population tripled (from 7400 to 21,000) as migrants flocked to the region for employment; between 1940 and 1950 alone the city experience a 50% increase in population (from 12,000 to 18,300; from 1960–1970 Elmwood experienced another nearly 50% increase in population, reaching an historic high of 29,500). As foreign immigration into the United States had been severely curtailed by this time, most of these new arrivals to Elmwood were from within the US.

The changes in regional economy and demography—to working-class residents laboring in industrial manufacturing jobs—brought on by these factories and newcomers were not necessarily welcomed by established Elmwoodites, a group consisting of descendants from the city’s early population of migrants heading west from the East Coast and continued arrivals from regional cities like Detroit, many of whom were descendants of European immigrants (primarily German, Polish, and Greek). The city’s leaders struck a course of passive resistance through inaction, doing little to plan for economic or demographic change. As a result, these changes occurred not only rapidly, but somewhat chaotically as well. This is most clearly evidenced in the housing crisis that struck the region during the mid-twentieth century (Sugrue 1996).

Such a rapid increase in population could be expected to strain housing stocks for a time, but little was done in Elmwood, by either city leaders or established residents to accommodate the unwelcome newcomers. The city was quickly overburdened. Existing homes were divided again and again into smaller, increasingly crowded units. Individuals and whole families camped outside of town, amidst the threat of harsh Michigan winters. The housing crisis reached a fever pitch by the early 1940s with the demands for labor brought on by wartime manufacturing. Recognizing the need for homes as a matter of national security, the federal government eventually stepped in and constructed temporary housing. After the war the temporary housing

and land surrounding it were converted into modest suburbs to permanently house the region's new population of working-class residents, eager to invest their earnings in real estate and begin the climb into the US middle classes.

Why were these newcomers, ostensibly fellow Americans, so unwelcome in the city? Many of those arriving in Elmwood during this period (1930–1960), both black and white, were poor individuals and families from the rural American South. While Southerners of both races had been migrating North for several decades preceding 1930, public and policy attention had been primarily focused on black migrants. However, according to historian James Gregory (2005), white Southern migrants began to garner more attention for three reasons. The Great Depression had increased concerns about urban poverty; modernist artistic endeavors took an interest in discovering the American “primitive,” of which the rural Southerner was exemplar *par excellence*; and the entertainment industry increasingly turned to representations of the “hillbilly” for humor and cultural critique. All served to make white migrants more visible.

This increased visibility, coupled with the marked uptick in numbers of new arrivals in Elmwood during this period, the 1943 riots in Detroit,²⁴ and an increasing focus on “urban adjustment” from sociologists and policy-makers (see for example Burgess 1925), resulted in increased hostility to “Southerners” in Elmwood that found expression through class-based distinctions.²⁵ Their accents, clothing, mannerisms, and land use practices—which included vegetable gardening, cultivating grape arbors, keeping chickens, and generally having various tools, machines, and other materially-useful items collected in their yards—all marked these new arrivals as different from long-standing Elmwoodites. Black migrants, recognized primarily in

²⁴ These riots, which began with an altercation between white and black youths, were commonly represented as a race riot, and the inherent racial antagonism between African-Americans and “backward” white Southerners was popularly blamed. However, the riots had an equally important class dimension, as working-class whites, as well as black Detroiters, found violent expression for their frustrations regarding poor housing and employment, social hostility, and discrimination (Hartigan 1999; Sugrue 1996).

²⁵ These distinctions were made by both established black and white residents. However, given the racial discrimination facing African-Americans, the appearance of internal class-conflict was minimized and a greater emphasis placed on presenting a unified community among Elmwood's black residents.

terms of their race, were subject to the same regimes of racial segregation and discrimination on the part of established white residents affecting long-time African-American Elmwoodites. As a result of their regional origins and class status, however, white migrants also faced a degree of discrimination. Those who remembered this time in Elmwood's history reported shopkeepers would refuse to sell to "Southerners", who were also denied credit at local establishments and struggled to find homes to buy or rent within the city.

Eventually the newcomers did settle into Elmwood, many occupying the newly built suburbs to the north and east. Their incorporation into the city's social body was part of a broader socioeconomic shift in Elmwood following industrialization. Increasing numbers of residents' livelihoods depended, directly or indirectly, on manufacturing, particularly heavy industry and automobile production. The city's tax-base also shifted, as more and more tax revenue came from Ford, General Motors, and other industrial manufacturing firms. This steady stream of municipal income, coupled with the boon to local real estate markets from growing populations, were financially beneficial, and Elmwood eventually, if reluctantly, embraced its new identity as a working class industrial town. To adapt the old saying, Elmwoodites eventually acquiesced that what was good for General Motors was good for Elmwood. This acceptance brought with it a degree of erasure, as the contentious history of Southern migration faded from Elmwoodites' everyday life. Yet while regional origins no longer affected residents' day-to-day affairs, the contours of these distinctions, particularly as they align with class differences, continued to crop up in Elmwood. This was quite visible in public controversies over the use of the term "hillbilly" by a local music festival, but less obvious in the disagreements about the city's land use policies and economic future.

Furthermore, the socioeconomic tumult of the mid-twentieth century had died down by the 1960s, though it left in its wake deep changes to Elmwood's social and spatial landscape. As a result of both discrimination and convenience, working-class residents concentrated in the newly built suburbs, located near factories and interstate interchanges. While in neighboring Detroit the

construction of suburbs drove increased racial segregation (Sugrue 1996; Thomas 1999), such dynamics did not occur in Elmwood, for several very particular historical reasons. First, the aforementioned discrimination against working-class whites gave the city-suburb divide a primarily classed nature in Elmwood. Second, the existence of an established African-American neighborhood resulted in many black newcomers entering into and integrating within this community. Third, the temporary federal housing built during World War II was not segregated, and the suburbs that took their place continued in this manner, being some of the few in the region to not be racially covenanted. Thus, the new suburbs, though relatively class homogenous, were not racially uniform; though majority white, they did include black residents. Rather, the related processes of industrialization and suburbanization laid a class-based form of residential segregation over an existing racial one. As a result, Elmwood's neighborhoods came to be defined not only by the race of their residents, but by the class as well, such that one could speak of white middle-class neighborhoods, black neighborhoods, and working-class neighborhoods. Though further socioeconomic upheavals were to come, by 1970 Elmwood had taken on many of the characteristics that would continue to define its social and spatial landscapes into the current day.

What Happened to Black Elmwood? 1930–1980

If industrialization—and as I will discuss further below, deindustrialization—were processes that drew in and affected the lives of both white and black Elmwoodites, they did so in race-specific ways. Just as class status and regional origin shaped the experience of many white residents in particular ways, so too did race, and inequalities based on differences of race, impact the lives of African-American residents. These particularities are all the more important when considered with regard to the current status of Elmwood's majority black neighborhoods. While political marginality and lower standards of living are undoubtedly the result of deindustrialization, they

are also characteristics of neighborhoods like Williams-Bell that are intimately tied to issues of race.

The kind of tepid integration found in Elmwood's suburbs also characterized factory labor and United Autoworkers (UAW; the union representing workers in automobile production facilities) membership. While automobile factories were some of the first shop floors to be integrated in the United States, this integration was the result of company-owners' (primarily Henry Ford's) efforts to break widespread strikes and unionization efforts during the 1930s with black labor, based on the logic that a combination of economic desperation and racial animosity would motivate African-American workers to cross the picket lines. As a result, the UAW became one of the first unions in the United States to be integrated, ultimately responding to this ploy by extending membership to black workers. This legacy of animosity, however, coupled with routine discrimination against black employees and union members wherein these workers were given the most physically demanding and demeaning jobs, while being offered the least amount of protections or seniority, resulted in an on-going precarious position for black laborers (Boggs 1968; Georgakas and Surkin 1975; Meier and Rudwick 2007).

In spite of these institutionalized forms of racism, Elmwood's black community reportedly did well for itself during the post-war period. Residents benefitted from the comparatively stable, high-wage factory work, and though elders remembered the pain of living in a segregated neighborhood, they also recalled a community that was prosperous and flourishing. During this period, the neighborhood made important political gains as well. Membership within the UAW and its organizational structure provided the basis for political organizing in Williams-Bell. Black Elmwoodites first held elected office in the 1940s, and by the 1960s, a black man was elected mayor and African-Americans served in numerous elected and appointed positions in the city. This growing political clout, coupled with the nationwide Civil Rights Movement, helped to end formal segregation in the city, though its legacy, coupled with

other forms of racism, have contributed to ongoing divisions between white and black communities and experience in Elmwood.

Thus, on the eve of deindustrialization, Elmwood's black community appeared as though it might be poised for a comeback. As the most precariously employed workers, however, black Elmwoodites were some of the first to feel the impacts of job loss, while having the fewest additional resources to counter the effects. Inequalities based on race, in relation to processes of deindustrialization, shaped the next several decades for the city's black neighborhoods in two additional ways. First, declining rates of industrial employment, and the declining significance of industrial employment in Elmwood's civic and political life overall, reduced the rates of UAW membership and the clout of the union. This in turn severely undermined the political organizing efforts and power of Elmwood's black neighborhoods. Second, the Williams-Bell business district, Williams Street, was demolished, over vociferous protests from neighborhood residents, between 1965 and 1974 as part of an urban renewal project. In many ways the civic and cultural heart of the neighborhood, the loss of these locally-owned businesses and gathering spaces was also economically devastating. While the urban renewal project did relocate the city dump out of the neighborhood, it also displaced numerous residents (many of which left Elmwood as a result). The vacant ten-acre parcel thus created became an interstate exit, a couple of heavily trafficked feeder streets, a second public housing project, and by the mid-1990s, an industrial park and two strip malls. Thus, by 1980 Elmwood's black neighborhoods had experienced a stark reversal in fortunes that, when coupled with the general effects of deindustrialization and the impacts of state service retrenchment in the 1980s and 1990s, left the community socially and economically struggling and in many ways tangential to the civic and political life of Elmwood at large. Black Elmwood would remain not only hidden, but due to urban renewal, have a core piece of its community and history literally erased. That the demolition of the Williams Street business district was entirely absent from the popular history of Elmwood, both its oral renderings and in

the city's historical society, speaks to the depth of this erasure and the ways it remains hidden in contemporary Elmwood.

Slow Burn: the Deindustrialization of Elmwood, 1970–2010

While the effects of deindustrialization were particularly harsh for the city's black residents, all Elmwoodites were impacted by this suite of social and economic changes. After the tumult of mid-twentieth century industrialization died down, Elmwood settled into a period of perceived stability as a working-middle class town. This moment was short-lived, however, as deindustrialization began in the late-1970s and once again Elmwood's economy, demography, and sociospatial landscape underwent significant changes.

During the 1970s, a series of factory relocations out of Northeastern and Midwestern US cities, price shocks in the oil market, and increased manufacturing competition from outside the US occurred (Bluestone 1982; Trachte 1985). Known as deindustrialization, these regional processes were part of a larger reorganization of the global manufacturing economy, driven by technological advances, trade deregulation, and the emergence of the financial industry as a powerful economic sector within the US national economy (Amin 1994; Harvey 1990). Understood in this way, deindustrialization is inseparable from globalization, as the increased spatial mobility of capital, operating alongside highly differential rates of labor mobility, created both "global cities" (Sassen 1991) which concentrated wealth and power among an elite capitalist class, and zones of deindustrialization, like the US Rust Belt, characterized by high rates of unemployment, abandoned and crumbling industrial infrastructure, and declining standards of living (Zukin 1991). In Michigan, unemployment reached a high at 16.5% during 1982 (reaching a low of 3.5% in 2000 before rising again during the Great Recession to 11% at the end of 2010). While manufacturing employment stood at a high of 32.8% of total employment in 1977, by 2009

it was at an all-time low of 11.8%. Meanwhile, employment in service-based industries steadily increased through the 1990s and 2000s (data for previous decades is unavailable).²⁶

As ethnographers, such as Ho (2009) and Walley (2013), have argued, however, these changes were not the disembodied machinations of abstract processes, but the results of socially embedded individuals, operating through existing relationships and cultural norms. Thus, deindustrialization should also be understood as a reorganization of labor relations, wherein factory owners, motivated by desires to increase profits, took advantage of both expanding global markets and the rise of finance capitalism, to move production to sites of lower-cost labor (Susser 1996; Walley 2013). The search for lower-cost labor was a response not just to increased foreign competition, though in the case of the Michigan automobile industry this is a particularly salient point; the price shocks to US oil markets in 1973 and 1979 led many Americans to begin purchasing smaller, more fuel-efficient cars, which were at the time mostly foreign-made, a change in the market that domestic car manufacturers initially refused to take seriously. The relocation of factories out of Michigan was, however, also a reaction to a highly-unionized workforce.²⁷ These movements in the global labor market operated along existing, unequal relationships of race, gender, and class, as manufacturing jobs shifted in large part to Third World locations. There factories employed in particular women of color, who were willing to labor long hours for little pay for the chance to lift themselves and their households out of dire poverty, while also having few claims to political power and existing avenues for organized resistance (Gunewardena and Kingsolver 2006).

Meanwhile, classist constructions of labor in the US allowed for dehumanizing rhetoric that cast working-class communities as collateral damage in the service of long-term national economic gain (Walley 2013). These discourses, promulgated by economic elites, held that short-

²⁶ All data obtained through the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics online data tables: <https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.mi.htm>.

²⁷ Union and state-specific time series data are unavailable. However, nationwide unionization rates fell dramatically from 20% in 1983 (earliest year data available) to 12% in 2010 (US BLS).

term hardships were necessary for long-term economic prosperity (Ho 2009), while at the same time eliding the unequal burden these changes placed on working class people and people of color. These groups were the least likely, due to both long-standing forms of discrimination and class cultural norms, to have either the financial or educational resources to weather hardship and find new jobs in other sectors that afforded comparable compensation (Hamer 2011; Walley 2013; Willis 1977). The result, in Elmwood like in Walley's (2013) Chicago or Hamer's (2011) East St. Louis, was "abandonment," a systematic disinvestment in the needs and well-being of a population no longer considered necessary for the generation of profit by economic and political elites (Hamer 2011: 20). In other words, the lives and futures of working-class peoples across the industrial US became hidden within depopulated discourses of "economic restructuring."

While representations of deindustrialization, in media narratives and the language of everyday Rust Belt residents, is often cataclysmic, these changes did not occur all at once, but over the course of several decades, unfolding from approximately 1975–1995. Elmwoodites did not experience deindustrialization as a sudden collapse of the day-to-day order of things, but as a gradual erosion of the city's industrial economy and residents' livelihoods. The Orchard Park neighborhood is exemplary of this. Built on the site of an orchard following World War II, the neighborhood became home to many working-class residents seeking the American Dream of upward mobility through suburban homeownership (Hayden 2004). The neighborhood, technically located in Elmwood Township, was within easy commuting distance (10–20 minutes driving) of the city's three automobile plants. There was a strip-mall nearby with a full-service grocer, hardware store, and many other shops. Like other of Elmwood's suburbs, Orchard Park was mixed-race, though it was, and continues to be, majority white. In these and many other small ways, like the neighborhood's winding, tree-lined streets, Orchard Park was exemplary of the post-war, working-class suburb.

Over decades of deindustrialization, the plants shed jobs; two the facilities changed hands several times and eventually closed (in 2008 and 2010, respectively). When the interstate exit

associated with the Williams-Bell urban renewal project opened in the late-1970s, the one serving the working-class suburbs of Orchard Park and Tremont closed. The new exit was meant to help draw people to the central business districts in the city proper, in an effort to revitalize them as deindustrialization began to take hold. The closure of this interstate exit was the beginning of the slow death of the suburbs' strip mall. Not enough customers would remain over the intervening decades in the struggling working-class neighborhoods of Orchard Park and Tremont to support the stores, and without the interstate, no one else bothered to come either. The smaller shops left first, then the grocer, and finally the hardware store. Like the shuttered plants, the property lingers on in derelict private ownership.

While many Orchard Park residents who could afford to left during this time, those that remained witnessed a steady decline in their property values,²⁸ and for home-owning members of the working-class, the end result was a loss of wealth. Any new residents to the neighborhood, quickly gaining a reputation for poverty and blight, had few resources themselves. While Orchard Park continued to be a primarily white suburb, the slowly crumbling factories, strip mall, parking lots, and interstate exit that surrounded it sent strong visual signals to outsiders that this was a neighborhood to be avoided, populated by people at best down-on-their-luck, at worst as morally decrepit as the infrastructure. When I asked about the future of the strip mall, one current Orchard Park resident and Garden Club member shook his head and mourned that this eyesore was the symbol of the suburbs, and not say, any of the beautifully landscaped homes of Garden Club members. Others at the Garden Club meeting nodded and murmured agreement.

While each neighborhood's story was unique, variations of this narrative occurred in working-class communities across Elmwood. Factory downsizing and closure, reconfigurations of interstates to better serve consumers not laborers, local businesses and residents cashing in

²⁸ Property values in the US are determined in large part by the appearance of surrounding homes, the presence of nearby amenities, and the quality of the school-district (Logan and Molotch 2007; Low 2004). As residents struggled to maintain their homes given dwindling household resources, nearby employers and retail left, and the schools (funded by local taxes) also lost revenue, home values decreased in response.

their losses and leaving, declines in wealth, and increasingly negative perceptions from outsiders affected mixed-race, mixed-class neighborhoods like Park Heights, and were particularly devastating for majority African-American working class neighborhoods like Tremont and Williams-Bell. Working-class people, and particularly working people of color, were also spatially concentrated, meaning that the economic and social impacts of deindustrialization also occurred unevenly across the city's neighborhoods. Depopulation and declining incomes meant that black and working-class neighborhoods had greater numbers of vacant houses, greater loss of businesses and other institutions, and a greater chance that homes would be poorly maintained when compared to whiter and more affluent neighborhoods. As these characteristics drove down property values, the ill-effects of deindustrialization reinforced themselves. Homes lost even more value and thus working-class and black residents continued to lose wealth and the means of acquiring more.

The loss of businesses, particularly factories, had profound impacts on the city as a whole as well. With fewer residents, and less prosperous residents, there were knock-on effects throughout the local economy, with non-industrial businesses struggling to stay profitable and many closing down. These closures represented a further loss of jobs and wealth in Elmwood, but also resulted in a large loss of tax revenue for the city. Many residents, including tax-paying homeowners left too, and between 1970–2010 Elmwood lost one-third of its population (29,500 to 19,500). This steady erosion of the city's tax base resulted in a municipal government with few financial resources for managing this forced restructuring of the local economy. As neoliberal policies began to take hold in the federal government beginning in the 1980s, a steady decrease in federal funds for social services and economic redevelopment projects compounded the city's financial woes.

The city-wide effects of economic restructuring and neoliberal policy implementation draw attention to the ways deindustrialization needs also to be understood in relation to these two inter-related processes, and the ways they helped to drive and justify the processes of

deindustrialization throughout the United States. Beginning in the 1980s, a shift occurred in US public policy toward technical, market-driven solutions to social and political problems (di Leonardo 2008; Goode and Maskovsky 2001). These policies, such as work requirements for social welfare programs (Collins 2008; Morgen and Maskovsky 2003), constructed the ideal citizen as a free, rational individual, consumer, and property owner, and altered the role of the state from guarantor of rights and services to facilitator of capital exchange, while retaining its punitive authority (Harvey 2005; Mullings 2003; Ong 2006). Widespread support for the retrenchment of state-based social service provision and the expansion of punitive state functions has been secured in part by public discourses of personal responsibility and the application of market-based logics of competition and profit to all aspects of life (Lyon-Callo 2008; Ouellette 2004; Meehan and Strauss 2015). Neoliberal policies and discourses, however, ultimately ignore or elide the ways social inequalities based on differences like race, class, and gender shape their outcomes (Bourgois 1996; Mullings 1997; Susser 1996). For example, Williams (2004) discusses how histories of racial discrimination limit African-American's access to banking and equity, spurring the use of debt to cope with decreases in public service provision—and in the context of Elmwood, we might, add the loss of jobs and wealth resulting from deindustrialization. This debt load subsequently supports popular justifications of poverty that blame poor personal and economic decisions, while linking these characteristics to racial differences. In Elmwood, neoliberalism is evidenced in many ways, such as simultaneous decreases in long-term unemployment benefits and calls for Elmwoodites to market their city and themselves as laborers within the nation's new economy.

This new economy is one predicated on consumption and the provision of services. On one end of an increasingly stratified service economy are the laborers of high finance, who earn enormous salaries managing other people's money, primarily that of upper-class elites and owners of capital. These financial sector workers are themselves responsible for the generation and perpetuation of concepts such as “shareholder value,” which have recast the role of

corporations from partners (along with labor and governments) in generating widespread economic prosperity to narrowly defined procurers of profit for shareholders (Ho 2009; Walley 2013). This realignment has had direct impacts on the constitution of the other end of the service economy. Here workers—such as restaurant employees, retail staff, nurses, daycare providers, and janitors—are asked to work long, unpredictable hours for low pay and few if any benefits (like health care or pensions) in order to increase profitability and returns on investment for owners and shareholders. Such demands are justified through the naturalization of market-based competition and assumptions that economic prosperity is an indicator of moral standing, both made possible through the neoliberal discourses discussed above. These jobs, often temporary or part time, offer precarious employment (Vosko 2010) and do not provide the levels of stability and income necessary to support a household and ensure class mobility (Hamer 2011; Walley 2013). The result in places like Elmwood is economic stagnation, as working-class residents once benefitting from well-remunerated factory jobs now struggle to make ends meet with available low-end service sector work, while middle-class residents labor increasingly long hours in white collar jobs—like health care administration or higher education—to maintain their socioeconomic standing, with little wealth returned to the community in the form of wages, social services, or capital investments.

Nevertheless, while deindustrialization affected everyone in Elmwood—the city government’s resources were deeply eroded and by this point many residents relied directly or indirectly on industrial labor—these negative effects were felt least among the city’s middle-class residents. These Elmwoodites were the least likely to have their livelihoods tied directly to automobile manufacturing, being engaged as business-owners or white-collar professionals. They also had more diverse kinds of capital (educational, economic, social, and political) with which to manage the crisis and buffer their households from its impacts. Long-time residents of neighborhoods like Hilltop (majority white, middle-class) reported experiencing declines in standards of living, but most examples were centered on the ill-effects noticed in elsewhere—

fewer businesses, strained city finances, blighted working-class neighborhoods—and were not directly experienced within their immediate surroundings. Rather as the regional economy shifted during the 1990s to accommodate growth in the health care, higher education, and information technology sectors, middle-class communities began to experience a degree of growth. Thus, while in Elmwood the story of deindustrialization is often told in terms of the city—its rise and fall as a working class industrial town providing the historical context for discussion of what the city will become. While this narrative makes highly visible Elmwood’s history of deindustrialization, what it obscures is the ways this history was variably experienced across differences of class and race, and thus the ways these differences continue to shape the emergence of Elmwood’s postindustrial future.

Nonhuman Histories in Elmwood

Before discussing further changes in middle-class life in Elmwood, and the ways these shifts were tied to the emergence of a nationwide postindustrial economy and the city’s contemporary planning and development priorities, it is necessary to pause and consider the histories of nonhuman life in the city, those beings whose very necessity and ubiquity seem to hide them in plain sight. From the region’s lakes and rivers to its oak forests, the nonhuman world shaped the emergence of Elmwood from its first occupation by Native American groups, determining in many ways its suitability as a transit hub and agricultural settlement. While Native American groups practiced agriculture in the area’s fertile soils, it was not until settlement by white and African-American arrivals that agriculture became a primary land use in the region. Within what became the City of Elmwood were various small-scale agricultural activities, including vegetable gardens, orchards, and chicken-raising.

No historical evidence exists for widespread vegetable gardening in the city prior to the 1930s, but it can be assumed that many homes with yards had at least a small kitchen garden, as this was a normal practice throughout urban America (Lawson 2005). Furthermore, the work of a

social worker during the Great Depression suggests that prior to this time gardening was indeed widespread. Concerned about rates of hunger among Elmwood's residents during the Depression, this woman connected families in need with vacant lots or unused backyards (solicited through newspaper advertisements) where they could garden. In partnership with the Kiwanis Club, she enlisted vegetable gardeners throughout the city for participation in a canning drive and city food pantry. While the prevalence of vegetable gardens waned in the latter half of the twentieth century, they remained a fixture of the urban landscape, and began to grow ever more popular once again in the early-2000s.

The first decade of the twenty-first century also witnessed the emergence of community gardening in Elmwood. The first community garden was founded by Sowing Change in 2003, and the number of gardens steadily grew over the following decade. At the time of my fieldwork in 2013–2014, there were over a dozen community gardens in Elmwood. This large number is the result of tireless work on the part of Sowing Change to support gardening in the area, as well as a kind of snowball effect as Elmwood gained a reputation in the region for being a place where lots of gardening and local food related things happened. The growth in community gardens was also spurred by the creation of a number of neighborhood associations in the mid-2000s as the result of a community policing initiative. Long-time community gardeners note that enthusiasm was high at this time, and was further bolstered by the economic constraints that many households faced as a result of the Great Recession. The growth of community gardens, and its popularity, appeared to have leveled off following 2010, and community garden stewards reported in 2013–2014 that membership had been holding steady for the past couple of years.

While gardens of one kind or another have endured in Elmwood's landscape, what has completely disappeared are the city's orchards. Fruit-trees grow well in southeastern Michigan, and orchards were common along the outskirts of the city from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. African-American elders recall their parents' generation working in the orchards that abutted the Williams-Bell neighborhood in the 1920s and 1930s. These orchards, as

well as the ones in the floodplains along the river to the southeast and those small groves dotted around the edges of the city, were all destroyed as the city grew rapidly during the mid-1900s. The Ford plant, Orchard Park neighborhood, and interstate, were all constructed on land that had been cleared of orchards. While orchards remain a visible presence in the rural areas outside the city, all that remains within Elmwood and its immediate environs are a few stray apple trees, though the city's permaculturalists are hard at work reversing this trend. In their yards and in their cooperative orchard one finds a variety of fruit trees, from hardy kiwi to peaches to apples.

A more successful resurgence narrative can be found in the stories of Elmwood's chickens, who though banished sometime in the 1950s–1960s, were allowed back in with the passage of a zoning ordinance in 2008 and have since greatly increased their numbers. Like gardens, there is no historical data on the prevalence of chicken-keeping in the city, but again one can assume that they were fairly common, as keeping chickens, where space permitted, was a normal practice throughout urban America (Brown 2016; Stull and Broadway 2004). Furthermore, several newspaper articles gleaned in Rose's historical research refer to competitions and prize-winners among the city's chicken-fanciers.²⁹ By mid-twentieth century the birds were certainly a presence in the city, as elders remember their parents and childhood neighbors tending coops; residents of Williams-Bell also remembered keeping pigs and goats during this time, and it is reasonable to assume that these animals could also be found in white neighborhoods.

These nonhuman residents, however, became far less welcome in the city during the mid-twentieth century for two interrelated reasons. As I will discuss further in Chapter 6, suburban land use practices that emphasized grass lawns and light landscaping, and dispensed with livestock and visible forms of livelihood production allowed established residents to identify themselves with the ideas of health, morality, and non-economized domesticity underlying these

²⁹ Chicken fancying—the practice of breeding chickens for their appearance and keeping them as pets—and keeping chickens for food are two different activities, but I and Rose both agree that it is reasonable to assume that if Elmwoodites were keeping chickens for fancying purposes, they were also keeping them for food. No one, however, seems to have considered these birds noteworthy enough to warrant a newspaper article.

aesthetic forms, thereby signaling their continued middle-class status amidst the economic shift in Elmwood from bourgeois transit hub to working-class industrial town. Furthermore, the identification of livestock raising with Southern migrants provided a further impetus for both established residents and newcomers in search of upward class mobility to distinguish themselves by stigmatizing these activities and passing zoning ordinances against livestock raising, ultimately removing chicken-keeping in the city by coding it as *déclassé*.

In other words, by equating urban gardening, chicken-keeping, and the collection of “junk” with “hillbillies” and “white trash,” established white residents were able to inscribe lines of class-based difference between themselves and white Southern migrants (Halperin 1998; Hartigan 1999; Heiman 2015; Low 2004)³⁰. This preserved, albeit in terms different from the previous era, their class-status as morally upright, responsible, deserving citizens of Elmwood, in contrast to the unkempt, profligate, and ignorant newcomers. Though this history has in many ways receded from popular narratives about the city’s past and about the resurgence of urban chicken-raising, these distinctions still resonated, if indirectly, in contemporary life in Elmwood, as when the steward of a community garden in a low-income housing complex chastised me for complaining about her strict standards of neatness. “We don’t want it to look hillbilly,” she explained, making things clear as mud until I recalled the work of John Hartigan (1999) and the classed meaning of the term “hillbilly” within white urban Michigan. What the steward meant was, they may be poor, but they still knew how to live proper middle-class lives, staking a claim for their inclusion in the city as deserving residents.

³⁰ Such efforts were not needed in regard to black migrants, as racial segregation and institutionalized discrimination based on skin color achieved this purpose. White Southern migrants, who could be (given the right clothing and mannerisms) visibly indistinguishable from established white residents, required more aggressive forms of policing (see Hartigan 1999).

Planning Postindustrial Elmwood, 1990–present

These gardeners were not the only ones trying to use public presentation to lay claim to aspirational futures in ways that simultaneously referenced and elided the city's history of industrialization, migration, and class formation. As the twenty-first century arrived, Elmwood itself was grappling with just what kind of city it would be, and what kinds of lives would be possible for its residents. This required the city's residents, and particularly its planners and other government officials, to address questions about how the city was to move on from its industrial past and what kind of role it would have in the United States' postindustrial economy, one defined by the consumption rather than production of durable goods and stratification between high-end providers and consumers of services (e.g. financial services, information technology), and precarious workers in sectors such as food service, retail, and health care (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Ho 2009).

The 1990s were a rollercoaster decade for much of industrial Michigan, Elmwood included. On the one hand, it is remembered as the City's nadir, when the business districts were empty of shops and patrons, crime was rampant, and Elmwood was known throughout the region more for its motorcycle gangs than booming factories. On the other hand, the nationwide economic boom of the late-1990s brought hopes of both a revived industrial sector and new economic opportunities in informational technology and other high-end service industries. As employment levels rose and the prospect of economic recovery seemed once again imaginable, real estate values—like those across the US—began to climb.

During the preceding decades of deindustrialization many of the businesses within the city's industrial district had closed and scrapyards proliferated. This entire area bordering downtown was perceived as an eyesore and misuse of what was becoming increasingly valuable land, prompting the city to take action. With efforts by Elmwood's remaining business-owners to revitalize the historic business district of Old Yards underway, the city government, in a bid to further buoy redevelopment efforts, began acquiring the lots that comprised the industrial district,

which it would eventually assemble into a 40-acre property known as Clayborne.³¹ The idea underlying the city government's actions was to take otherwise unattractive, formerly industrial properties, clear them, and then sell the bundled parcel to a private developer who would construct a mixed-used development in the style of New Urbanism.³² This development was intended to in turn help kickstart the further revitalization of the city by attracting new businesses and young professionals, aiding in Elmwood's transition to a postindustrial economy. While financial outlays for purchasing and clearing the property were significant, requiring the issue of bonded debt, with economic growth and rising real estate values during the late 1990s, the city's leaders felt confident they would end up turning a profit on the sale and tax revenue, while ridding the downtown district of derelict and dangerous buildings.

While the economic recession of 2001 shook confidence in the economic revival of southeastern Michigan, all three automobile plants continued operation and hopes remained for both a resurgence of blue-collar employment and the growth of white-collar jobs in the city and region. As such, the City of Elmwood continued to clear and remediate the Clayborne property. A developer was identified and designs for the property prepared. The Great Recession of 2008 brought an end to these plans, and to Elmwood's tentative recovery. In the city unemployment increased, foreclosures and out-migration generated rising numbers of home vacancies, more businesses closed, and Elmwood's tax base once-again shrank dramatically. By 2010 two of the factories had been shuttered. Deindustrialization had returned to Elmwood with a seeming vengeance.

³¹ The name Clayborne is taken from one of the main streets running through this industrial area. The street grid was torn up when the buildings on the property were demolished, and Clayborne Street no longer exists. The name continues to be used to refer to the 40-acre property however, and has become a very pregnant term in colloquial dialogue, referring not just to the land, but the entire redevelopment and financial imbroglio it resulted in.

³² New Urbanism is defined by the Congress for the New Urbanism (www.cnu.org) as "a planning and development approach based on the principles of how cities and towns had been built for the last several centuries: walkable blocks and streets, housing and shopping in close proximity, and accessible public spaces. In other words: New Urbanism focuses on human-scaled urban design." New Urbanism has been critiqued for its attempt to manufacture an historic form of organic urbanism and the ways it facilitates gentrification (Zukin 2008, 2009).

While the following years were ones of political and economic turmoil, when I returned to Elmwood in 2013 there seemed to be a general consensus on where the city stood—it was not in good shape. With two automobile plants and many other large businesses closed, the city had little tax base beyond its cash-strapped residents, whose property taxes were already some of the highest in the region, despite relatively low property values. Yet another developer had pulled out of the Clayborne project and the bonded debt on the property was scheduled to come due in two years. Adding insult to injury, the use of the emergency financial management law³³ by the administration of Michigan Governor Snyder meant that even the possibility of bankruptcy could cause the city to lose its democratically-elected governance. To make ends meet the city government had begun to cut most non-essential services. For example, the parks department was closed and bare maintenance relegated to the Department of Public Works; firefighters and police officers were laid off, and the planning department reduced to two staff members. In other words, by 2013 the City of Elmwood was broke.³⁴

Once again, while the impacts of these financial and economic problems were felt by all Elmwoodites, they were not felt evenly. For those who had never recovered from losing their jobs, the value of their homes, and the institutions undergirding their communities, the effects were particularly devastating. Foreclosure rates in working-class neighborhoods like Orchard Park and Tremont rose sharply.³⁵ Though I do not have the data to corroborate the claim, Township

³³ PA 436 of 2012 gives the governor of Michigan the legal authority to appoint an emergency financial manager for any public entity (such as a city or school district) which is deemed to be in financial crisis. This manager has the authority to make all decisions regarding the entity's finances, including overruling elected officials' decisions and abrogating union contracts.

³⁴ Matters continued to worsen. While the city was able to consolidate and refinance its debt, in 2016 a ballot measure to increase property taxes in order to make bond payments failed. The city is now reduced to essential personnel, and measures such as requiring residents to pay for street-lighting are being floated in order to keep Elmwood solvent and out of emergency management. It should also be noted that due to retail and housing development targeting more affluent residents, and the lower number of services provided, Elmwood Township has avoided the worst of these financial outcomes, though finances remain constrained.

³⁵ I have not been able to locate historic foreclosure data based on zip code or census tract. During the period 2007–2010 the foreclosure rate of Elmwood County rose from <0.75% to 1.5–2%. While these numbers are low compared to all neighboring counties, which rose to 2–4.45% by 2010, the presence of a neighboring wealthy city skews data at the county level, and it is reasonable to assume that foreclosure rates in Elmwood, particularly in working-class neighborhoods, were higher than 2% (Isely and Rotondaro

officials repeatedly stated that at the height of the crisis (2009–2010) the neighborhood of Orchard Park had one of the highest foreclosure rates in Michigan, which consistently had one of the top-ten rates for the US at that time. Residents in places like Orchard Park had for years faced dwindling access to the well-paid, stable jobs provided by industrial employers. Without such employment, which had made their homes affordable if aspirational purchases decades ago, residents cobbled together livelihoods from low-wage, long-hour service sector work or the fixed incomes provided by pensions, unemployment benefits, and other social services. When mortgage payments sky-rocketed in the fallout of the 2008 housing market collapse, many homeowners, in Orchard Park, Elmwood, and the US, found themselves “underwater”—they owed more on their homes than they were worth. The seemingly invisible struggles of working-class Elmwoodites and those like them across the US suddenly came starkly into view as the nation’s economic growth came to a screeching halt. With little chance of finding better jobs or recovering lost real estate value, residents of Orchard Park and similar neighborhoods moved away or foreclosed. Eventually new residents moved in; many of them, like Bill and Jane, a middle-aged gardening couple, attracted to Orchard Park for its relative affordability in 2010. In the years since they witnessed a number of young couples move into the neighborhood, which has since stabilized. Home values and occupancies were increasing and the Orchard Park residents with whom I interacted in 2013–2014 effused a cautious optimism about the neighborhood.

Other working-class neighborhoods, particularly those of color (Orchard Park is majority white), did not fare as well. By the 2010s, high foreclosure rates had resulted in an increasing number of rental units, owned by investors from both in and out of state, as well as a few local property owners. This rise in rentals was most acutely felt in the city’s African-American neighborhoods—Williams-Bell and Tremont—where it was also particularly dislocating. Through a quirk in US public housing policy, wherein Section 8 voucher levels are pegged to the

2012). For comparison, the national average rose from 1.03% in 2007 to 2.23% in 2010 (<http://www.realtytrac.com/content/press-releases/record-29-million-us-properties-receive-foreclosure-filings-in-2010-despite-30-month-low-in-december-6309>).

county median income, the value of Section 8 vouchers issued to low-income Elmwoodites was reported to be roughly equivalent to market-rate rents on housing in Elmwood—a low-income city in a wealthy county—approximately \$1200 for a 2/3-bedroom apartment.³⁶ In majority African-American neighborhoods, where property values and rents were already below average for the city, a landlord could reportedly make more money through Section 8 rentals than market-rate housing. Given this anomalous real estate market, and the city’s regional stigma as a working-class city and city of color, the proportion of federally-assisted households was higher in Elmwood than surrounding areas.³⁷ While I did not encounter any low-income households recently moved into the area, informants in both the Williams-Bell and Tremont neighborhoods reported that new residents from as far away as Detroit were arriving, drawn by the availability of Section 8 housing. While home-owning residents in these neighborhoods did not express publicly, or privately to me, the stigmatization of renters found in some other Elmwood neighborhoods, they did express concern that these newcomers were not really a part of the community. At a Williams-Bell Neighborhood Association meeting, one black homeowner expressed her concern at not knowing who young people’s parents were. She explained she used to know, so if she saw someone up to no good she could talk to their mother first. Continuing, she expressed frustration at seeing youth “not from the neighborhood” committing minor infractions, such as blocking her driveway with their cars, and with no other recourse having to call the police, who as it happened, were understaffed and unable to respond in a timely manner to such minor complaints.

³⁶ For comparison, the HUD specified rent-limit for a 3-person household in Elmwood County was \$1992.00.

Section 8 itself is a program of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide housing through private real estate markets. Rather than provide more publically owned housing, HUD issues vouchers, pegged to income level and county median income, that eligible households can use to pay or assist with rent. Landlords must be registered with HUD in order to receive Section 8 vouchers.

³⁷ Data on the proportion of Section 8 housing in Elmwood as compared to surrounding areas is unavailable. However, data show that approximately 25% of Elmwood’s residents receive some form of public assistance, and that several of Elmwood’s neighborhoods, including Williams-Bell and Tremont, have been designated by the Michigan Housing and Development Authority as areas to avoid further registering Section 8 eligible properties due to existing density.

The search for affordable housing was also a key characteristic of the city's more affluent and white neighborhoods. Interviewees from Hilltop and High-Oak regularly told me, sometimes with embarrassment, others matter-of-factly, that they had decided to live in Elmwood because it was affordable. "We could live in [the nearby affluent city]," one couple told me, "but we could never afford to live in a neighborhood as nice as Hilltop. We looked at Duncan Hill [a comparable neighborhood in said city] and it was all out of our price range." Just as industrialization and suburbanization had made home-ownership possible for working-class residents during the 1950s--1970s, so deindustrialization and the housing market collapse had made living in a large bungalow or historic home in a shady neighborhood walking distance to key amenities possible for these young professionals. Working in sectors like higher education, information technology, and healthcare, as staff at both the local college and hospital, as well as the expansive University of Michigan university and healthcare system, and both local and national IT and software development firms, most could afford to live elsewhere, but chose Elmwood because they could live a certain kind of lifestyle there. These residents, all of whom I talked to were white, did not want to live in suburban developments, but in the city, in well-established neighborhoods with a sense of community, where they could walk to shops and restaurants. As more and more young professionals—arguably Florida's "creative class"—sought similar lifestyles, such neighborhoods in affluent cities quickly became unaffordable, catering increasingly to an elite managerial and capital-owning class. Coupling concerns with affordability to desires for a certain lifestyle, these households, many of whom moved into the city from the 1990s on, were able to make-do by electing to live in Elmwood.

Often those Elmwoodites who told me they were drawn to Elmwood for the possibilities of an affordable urban lifestyle would soon add that the city's "scrappy, DIY ethos," had encouraged them to stay. From the 1980s onward, young people, artists and musicians, and those looking for a place to live relatively unnoticed as a gay or lesbian couple were drawn to the city by the low costs of living and down-and-out reputation. Elmwood soon developed a small arts

scene and gay and lesbian community. Following them came more economically stable, middle-class residents attracted by the opportunity to live more alternative urban lifestyles. One man, a participant in the city's punk scene during his college years, returned to raise his family, feeling he could indulge his continuing interests in the arts while exposing his children to a diverse and creative community, all while commuting to a nearby city for a job in the tech sector. The same sense of possibility for living in the city differently would several decades later attract urban agriculture enthusiasts, who would find a hospitable place for their front-yard gardens, chicken coops, and beehives.

Thus, these Elmwoodites, who actively sought to imagine a future for their city and urban environments that prominently featured vegetable gardening and livestock raising, comprised the bulk of the gardeners I encountered and who informed this work. They were by and large white and middle class, and had arrived in Elmwood sometime from the 1990s onward. Though many of them would fall within the parameters of what Florida defines as the “creative class,” as previously discussed they were unable to afford their desired lifestyles in the region's preeminent creative class cities. Those that could afford to live as they wished elsewhere chose to live in Elmwood as a form of active repudiation of what they considered to be an increasingly pretentious, elitist, “embourgeoisement” of their lifestyle. Therefore, regardless of where they were positioned along an increasingly stratified spectrum of creative, middle classes, these individuals and households engaged in a kind of aspirational living, wherein they sought a kind of “green,” DIY, and “authentic” way of living. Their positionality gave these Elmwoodites a specific experience and perspective of the city, one that was at once oriented toward the possibilities for more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable forms of urban living and yet quick to accept their narratives about life in the city and desires for its future as correct and worth pursuing. The result was often a downplaying or elision of the experiences of working-class Elmwoodites and Elmwoodites of color, that overlooked the important and historic role of gardening and livestock raising in these communities.

As in many other cities throughout the US, this population and the socioeconomic dynamics they generated would also become bound up in concerns about gentrification. On the one hand, Elmwood (as of 2013–2014) could arguably be described as not gentrifying, if gentrification is understood as an economic processes wherein property values and associated costs of living rise as real estate becomes increasingly bound up in global commodity markets (Smith 2002). While rents had been trending up due to tightening markets in the county, they had not spiked beyond affordability, and property values themselves had not risen markedly.³⁸ In other words, while there were concerns over the *quality* of affordable housing, no one was being forced to leave Elmwood due to costs of living.

However, if gentrification is understood to also involve particular kinds of social and cultural processes, another interpretation is possible. Scholars such as Zukin (2008, 2009) have argued that gentrification should also be understood as a search on the part of more affluent residents for “authentic” urban experiences. This movement of middle and upper class urban residents into neighborhoods whose affordable home values allow for a higher ethnic and class diversity of residents and land uses trigger an upward spiral in property values. However, it also sets off a host of other changes as these residents bring with them their desires not only for authenticity, but also certain standards of living—expectations about building upkeep, the kinds of goods and services offered, and so on—that while possibly desirable to the city’s less-affluent residents was not necessarily economically or socially accessible (Cahill 2007). In this regard, Elmwood was in fact beginning to gentrify. For example, there had been a proliferation of “foodie”-style restaurants—local ingredients, unorthodox combinations, upscaled takes on staple foods like mac & cheese and sausage, and a heavy emphasis on local, microbrewed beer. While these establishments were widely welcomed, the clientele at most were overwhelmingly white and middle class. A far more diverse crowd could be found buying equally delicious \$1 tamales for lunch at the Latino grocer or a greasy burger at the coney island—the kinds of authenticity

³⁸ Though as of 2017, according to several local sources, this is beginning to change.

that had arguably drawn the patrons of Elmwood's new restaurants to the city in the first place. Thus, while everyone could still afford to live in Elmwood, the social landscape remained bifurcated along class lines. What had changed was the visibility of these divides. The fact that industrialization and deindustrialization had affected, in similarly positive or negative ways, the population of the city as a whole served to subsume the ways those effects were experienced in class and race differentiated ways. What the nascent gentrification of Elmwood appeared to be doing was creating concrete spatial changes that highlighted class difference through, for example, divergences in local business clientele.

Concerns about what a postindustrial Elmwood could be, and the dynamics of possibility and gentrification exemplified through the proliferation of urban agricultural practices, all came together in 2013 as the City embarked on an effort to write a new master plan. In this plan, adopted in October 2013, government officials and private consultants set forward a vision for Elmwood's future that dispensed with the idea that the city's economy would be based on manufacturing, or on any one primary economic sector. The plan, rather, "assumes growth on a microeconomic level" and identified four sectors where such growth was emerging: small manufacturing and craft production, creative economy,³⁹ renewable energy, and food. In so doing, the city would transition from a manufacturing base to a diverse "knowledge" economy, which included green and creative businesses. Though passed, the plan was not without its detractors and a fair amount of contestation within the city. These disagreements were based in competing visions about whether Elmwood should indeed be postindustrial, and if so, what that meant. They were also deeply bound up in debates over just who the future of the city was for, captured harshly in the words of one resident, speaking at a public forum in protest of an affordable housing development proposed for the Clayborne site, who proclaimed they did not want "those

³⁹ This rather vague term is defined in the plan as "advertising, architecture, art, crafts, design, fashion, film, music, performing arts, publishing, research and development, software, toys and games, television and radio, and video games."

people” living in downtown, because they would not patronize the kinds of local businesses they were trying to attract and develop.

In fact, by 2013 Clayborne had become a metonym for the socioeconomic future of Elmwood and the increasing class-based tensions surrounding it. At this point the city had taken on the task of developing the property themselves, selling it parcel by parcel. Opinions about how development should proceed varied, both within and across class groups in the city, yet were clearly shaped by Elmwood’s multiple class (and racial) histories. Though each individual had their own complex calculus by which they determined their attitudes toward Elmwood’s development, and the actual breakdown of the various positions thus generated defied simplistic classification, in public conversations there emerged three widely accepted positions, divided across an axis of optimism and *real politik*. On the one side were those who believed a better future was possible for Elmwood. Among them were the eco-conscious gardeners and middle-class cheerleaders of DIY-Elmwood. They envisioned, and in fact had actually claimed, the space as a commons. Various groups of residents had constructed a walking trail along the river, erected large public art works, seeded native wildflowers and foraged for herbs, and held officially unsanctioned events such as a May Day celebration. While some hoped against hope to retain the property as a public space, most realized that development was necessary, and hoped for things such as waterfront brew pubs, a year-round farmers’ market, mixed-income housing, and perhaps even a bigger food co-op or local grocery chain. As I will discuss further in Chapter 6, this groups of residents were instrumental in articulating the city’s new economic development and land use priorities for the future, in particular as regarded the development of the new master plan.

Another set of optimists, however, had a nearly opposite approach. Composed of a varied assortment of residents, often referred to as old-timers, these Elmwoodites had for the most part resided in the city since at least the mid-twentieth century. They represented a range of racial and class identifications, but were united in their deep skepticism of “green” and “creative” development projects. Instead they desired forms of economic development and land use that

were reminiscent of the city's industrial, or even preindustrial, past—large, corporate employers or craft manufacturers, condominiums for professionals and well-off retirees (as opposed to rental housing), maybe even some high-end chain shops and restaurants.

On the other side, so to speak, were those who approached the Clayborne development with a sense of *real politik*. Some of these were former members of the optimist crowd, resigned to the reality that Elmwood needed development, any development, on the property. During my research period parcels were sold to a dollar store and a country recreation department, and one was under negotiation for a mixed-income apartment complex.⁴⁰ While the county recreation facility was much desired, many residents were also concerned that it would not be paying property tax. Likewise, while the dollar store would generate tax revenue, it was not the type of development that most in the city desired; it provided low-quality jobs and products and did not “uplift” the image of the city. Nevertheless, for the *real politik* crowd, it was better than nothing. Many of this group were also working-class residents and residents of color; they too desired a better future for their city, but these desires were tempered in their conversations with me by an understanding and even need for there to be something, anything, occupying this vacant space. Having lived in very intimate terms through the worst of a quarter-century economic crisis that seemed to continue to unfold across southeastern Michigan, these residents wanted better employment options. “Why can’t we get a Costco?” one African-American woman, an instructor at a local community college, asked in a community meeting. “I hear they pay living wages and people around here [implying residents outside of Elmwood] would come to shop there too.” But struggling as they were to make ends meet, living in a city that could barely pay its most basic bills let alone provide additional social services to its residents, they took a more pragmatic approach. I wish we could do better [than the dollar store and affordable housing complex], the refrain went, but at least it’s something.

Thus, Elmwood in 2013–2014 was at a sort of crossroads, as it arguably had been for decades. Most residents had accepted that the region’s industrial economy would not return. With that came the impetus to consider what other socioeconomic and ecological futures were possible. These senses of possibility varied widely, from the imagining of a city full of gardens and chickens and small entrepreneurs creating ecologically sustainable livelihoods, to a suburbanized city existing primarily for the provision and consumption of services. Moreover, discourses of possibility frequently left unsaid, and in fact often kept covered over, three important factors that were also shaping the future of Elmwood. First, this discourse represented part of a neoliberal discipline that insists the city and its residents market themselves as attractive commodities in the global marketplace, exemplified in the concern to attract particular kinds of businesses. Second, that until these possibilities are realized, Elmwood remains a deindustrial city, that is a city with dwindling tax-base and resources, who must rely increasingly on residents, themselves struggling to make ends meet amidst precarious low-wage employment, lack of social services, and declining wealth, to care for their neighborhoods and provide basic municipal services. Finally, given the still all too often unacknowledged histories of race- and class-based inequalities that have shaped the city and its sociospatial landscapes, the effects of all of this—deindustrialization, imaginings of the future, postindustrial economies—will be experienced quite unevenly.

Nevertheless, the belief on the part of many Elmwoodites that a better future for their city and its residents (human and nonhuman like) is possible is significant because it indicates a commitment to Elmwood as a place. While the elisions discussed above matter, and I engage with them throughout this dissertation, these individuals routinely evinced a deep sense of care, expressed through activities like urban vegetable gardening and beekeeping, for their communities and environments. In the following chapter I examine gardening and beekeeping as practices of care in Elmwood in order to explore the ways contestations over the future of Elmwood were in part rooted in deep personal desires among residents for mutual well-being among the city’s diverse human and nonhuman inhabitants.

Chapter 4: Household, Community, and Ecosystem: Vegetable Gardening and Beekeeping as Practices of Care

Workdays at the Towerview Community Garden were often a mixed bag. Dealing with the push and pull of different residents' interests and the limited resources available to these low-income, elderly, and/or disabled community gardeners, along with long hours of physical labor, often taxed me emotionally and physically. Yet each day brought new encounters with Towerview residents, gardeners, and the plants and animals of this lively ecosystem. There were moments of joy in a gardening task completed, casual conversations that shared rich lives, rowdy threats made toward marauding woodchucks, the peacefulness of quietly sitting or laboring together outdoors. I was enjoying this atmosphere, complete with birdsong and the skittering of small mammals one late spring afternoon in 2014 while raking the freshly tilled soil in the garden. Nearby, Peggy and Jeanette, two Towerview community gardeners, cleared the wheelchair accessible raised beds that lined both sides of the sidewalk. Several people came and went, waving and saying hello, before Linda, a fellow gardener, wandered by. She stopped and chatted with Peggy and Jeanette before turning to me and my patch of freshly raked soil. "I love the smell of dirt," she exclaimed. "And I like to garden in my bare feet so I can feel it on my toes." I nodded my appreciation and we paused together, taking in the smell of earth, sound of birds, and warm breeze before moving on, she back to the building, me to my raking. In this encounter, and many others like it, the garden became intelligible to me as more than a place where people grew food, socialized, and experienced nature; it was also the site and physical concretization of care work. Laboring individually and together, the Towerview community gardeners were working to provide themselves with fresh, healthy, affordable food; to create a space where they and their neighbors could gather; and to nurture various plants, soil microbiota, and birds. In other words, they were caring for their households, community, and ecosystems.

Over the following weeks I gently asked Peggy, in one way or another, why she spent so

much time, energy, and personal resources on the garden, particularly as she did not always receive appreciation from her fellow residents. She told me the story of a resident who had killed himself earlier that week, one of several suicides in the last year. “People are depressed here,” she said. “They do drugs and commit suicide. People don’t get cared for. But the garden is something nice. They can come outside and get some fresh air and maybe it helps cheer them up. And they can work here too and feel like they can do something good.” In her words Peggy captured the ways her care, enacted through gardening, was both something she gave to Towerview residents and a way she forged relationships to them. By organizing meetings, fundraisers, and workdays, building wheelchair accessible beds and tending vegetables, these gardeners like Jeanette and Linda strove, as Jeanette put it, to do “something nice.” They cared for their fellow residents by investing their own time and resources into a project that benefitted them all, using the garden as a means to create and maintain relationships—“It brings the community together,” Linda said. More than maintaining relationships and securing mutual well-being, these gardeners also care because they believe it is the right thing to do; their care carries an ethical imperative (Tronto 1993), expressed in Peggy’s concerns that Towerview residents were not being cared for by others.

The work of the Towerview community gardeners also exemplified the ways care is an active, on-going process, requiring trade-offs and constant improvisation, or “tinkering” (Mol et al. 2010). Meeting the needs of elderly or disabled gardeners through structures like wheelchair-accessible raised beds, while having limited access to the able-bodied labor and monetary resources necessary to build such beds, represented one of many on-going challenges. Peggy, Jeanette, Linda, and their fellow gardeners employed an array of methods, from indoor group meetings to pancake breakfasts to taking over part of the parking lot for construction projects, to raise funds and to encourage participation among residents regardless of ability. If the physical practicalities of gardening required Towerview residents to continually tinker with the ways they found to enact care, it also drew them into ongoing relationships with a variety of nonhuman

beings. Gardeners like Linda actively tended to the well-being of soil,⁴¹ keeping it free of pests and replenishing it with compost. When Linda stood barefoot in the garden soil she had carefully nurtured, the touch and smell of it brought her pleasure. Together woman and soil were bound up in a relationship of interdependence, each benefitting from the other's well-being.

Gardeners' relationship with the soil, as exemplified by Linda, also underscore the ways care is an active relationship realized in practice. It is the ongoing connections to soil, taking place day after day, as gardeners tended to their plants' needs, that brought gardeners into a relationship of care with it. In a sort of inversion of Mol's (2008) formulation, it was not an *a priori* desire to care for the soil that generated an ongoing relationship with it, but rather, the continued contact with soil necessitated by gardening that generated an ethical commitment to its well-being. In this way, the enactment of care through gardening resonates with Aulino's (2016) findings regarding elder care in Northern Thailand, where Aulino found that care emerged through the enactment of ritual, of routinized, embodied practice, rather than originating in a prior ethical stance. While I do not conceive of gardening as a form of ritual, and do identify the ways gardening as care work does derive from gardeners' ethical stances, I take up Aulino's work, along with Hustak & Myers' (2012) research on the ways affective relationships between human and nonhuman beings can emerge through intimate and embodied interaction, to consider the nature of care as an active and ongoing relationship of gardeners to their communities and ecosystems. What kinds of relationships to households, communities, and ecosystems emerge as gardeners care for these entities? What is the relationship between gardeners' everyday, embodied experiences of their communities and ecosystems and the ethical stances they derive toward them? Do these relationships create opportunities for different kinds of relations amongst

⁴¹ In organic agriculture, soil is considered a living thing, dense with the worms, insects, bacteria, and fungi that make plant life possible (see for example Coleman 1992; Gershuny and Smillie 1995). Nearly all of the gardeners with whom, including those at Towerview, I worked practiced chemical-free growing techniques and evinced a degree of understanding regarding the vitality of soil. All understood it was something that required nourishment and careful tending, even if they did not speak explicitly about soil as a living thing, or label themselves organic gardeners.

people, place, and nonhuman life?

As the example of Towerview Place makes clear, however, these caring relations cannot be understood outside of the social inequalities and political-economic contexts that shape them, as when these gardeners must find ways to overcome deficits in available resources brought about by public disinvestment in social service provision and discrimination against the poor and people with disabilities. These disinvestments, along with a lack of public investment in climate change responses, are generating ever-greater social, economic, and ecological precarity; the very real threats of downward class mobility and ecological catastrophe lead many Elmwoodites, and many Americans like them, to worry that the conditions of their lives, and their children's lives, will not improve over time. Under these conditions it becomes increasingly important to find ways of living that are socially equitable, ecologically sustainable, and pleasurable (D'Alisa et al. 2014), or as Tsing (2015) puts it, "living well together." In this chapter I consider the ways gardening does, and does not, provide such ways of living. To do so I follow a tripartite analysis of gardening as a form of care for households, communities, and ecosystems. I begin by presenting the ways two different backyard gardeners used vegetable gardening, as well as beekeeping and chicken-raising, to care for their households. Through the examples of Towerview, and the majority African-American, working-class neighborhood of Tremont, I investigate the ways gardening, specifically community gardening, is used to care for communities. I then turn to analyze the ways both community and backyard gardeners use these activities to care for their ecosystems, both in the current moment and with attention to the future. I conclude by considering the ambiguity of entanglements between gardeners and other human and nonhuman beings. Generated by desires to care for communities and ecosystems, these relations both suggest possibilities for flourishing amidst ruin, precarity, and uncertainty, and, at the same time, generate sociospatial inequalities based on differences of class and race.

Care for Households

The most intimate form of care work gardeners and beekeepers enacted was to tend to their own needs and desires, as well as those of their households. The provision of nourishment or sensory pleasure for themselves and their families was universally the first motivation for gardening or beekeeping cited by the Elmwoodites with whom I spoke. This primacy reflects the fact that gardening and beekeeping are practices defined by the production of food or aesthetic enjoyment, and thus in some sense were always enactments of care.

Doris, a middle-aged African-American mother and fitness instructor, is a devout Christian and believed that it was her and her family's spiritual duty to be healthy. "Our bodies are temples to God, and we are called on to take care of that temple," she explained to me during an interview in the fall of 2014. I had met Doris a few weeks earlier when I attended the line dancing class for seniors she taught at a community center in the Williams-Bell neighborhood. Upon further questioning Doris explained that being healthy included eating fresh vegetables. She preferred gardening because it provided the freshest and cheapest produce, and she and her husband tended three sixteen square foot beds at their home in one of Elmwood's working class suburban neighborhoods. Doris and her husband both worked and cared for their children though, and did not have enough time to grow all the vegetables their family needed, so Doris shopped at the farmers' market. "At the supermarket," she explained, "you can get cheap produce, but it isn't very fresh or healthy. To get the high quality produce you have to pay more. At the farmers' market though, you can get produce almost as good as that from the garden, and it's cheaper than the high-quality food in the supermarket." Shopping at the farmer's market had the added benefit for Doris of being a form of participation in what she calls "an awakening in Elmwood around growing and eating fresh food." Doris was proud of her family's involvement in this awakening and hoped that by being active participants in their neighborhood and church communities they were leading by example.

In drawing together physical health and spiritual well-being, evident in her language

about the body as “temple” and alternative agrifood movements as an “awakening,” Doris’ narrative also draws attention to the ways gardening is a form of care. Growing her family’s food and shopping at the farmers’ market are choices Doris made based on a sense of moral obligation to her and her family’s well-being, while also accounting for her interest in the well-being of her broader communities. Gardening and associated alternative agrifood practices like farmers’ markets were essential ways for her to meet these obligations because they enabled her to balance her family’s physical and spiritual health with their time and financial constraints and commitments to their various communities.

Care for self and household is not limited to providing food and ensuring health; some gardeners like James also considered gardening and beekeeping ways to care for the long-term viability of their households in the face of social and ecological precarity. James is a slight, white man and an instructor at a local university. He lived with his female partner in a home in the High-Oak neighborhood where he raised chickens, tended two honeybee hives, and cultivated beds of vegetables, herbs, and flowers. James’ home had a root cellar and when I met him during a visit to his home to view his honeybee hive, he was currently teaching himself various food preservation techniques, as well as how to save seeds. With a small family and relatively secure and well-remunerated job, James had the necessary leisure time to devote to such extensive gardening and beekeeping pursuits, though as he explained in an interview in the fall of 2014, he wished he had more time still. His goal was to acquire the kinds of knowledge and resources that would help him and his household consume less and produce more. James’ drive for self-sufficiency stemmed from a deep distrust in the ability of political institutions to address the causes and effects of global climate change and a strong sense of responsibility to take action against the ecological unsustainability of contemporary urban life. “We are going to have to change the ways we [urban residents] live. We’re going to have to use fewer fossil fuels and make more things ourselves and live more locally circumscribed lives.” James was also skeptical of community projects, describing much of the current enthusiasm for urban agriculture as a

“lifestyle trend.” He did not want to be identified in this way and was more comfortable going it alone. Growing and preserving food, saving seeds, raising chickens, and keeping bees were all ways of acquiring the means and skills he regarded as necessary for living in a way that consumed fewer resources and emitted less carbon dioxide. These practices both cared for his family, by preparing them for coming lifestyle changes, and global ecology, by cultivating ways of life that nurtured rather than strain the capacity of agricultural ecosystems.

Many of the gardeners with whom I spoke had similar narratives to Doris and James in that households were the primary objects of their care. Yet as these two narratives show, households were not the only things beings cared for by gardening. Communities and ecosystems were also beneficiaries, and like Doris and James, most of the gardeners I talked to also discussed the benefits of gardening and beekeeping for their neighborhoods and broader communities, as well as the good these practices did for local and global ecosystems. For a large minority of the gardeners and beekeepers who participated in this study these forms of care were in fact given as much emphasis and attention as care for self and household.

Care for Communities

The Towerview Community Garden

My first trip to the Towerview Apartments was filled with uncertainty. I knew of the community garden there from my previous experience working for Sowing Change, but had not visited it during that time. Jeanette, a retired social worker in her 70s who got about with the assistance of a walker, was waiting for me just inside the front door, so as to buzz me through the second set of doors. Once inside she introduced me to the young woman at the front desk, who sat behind a sliding pane of glass. With that formality out of the way Jeanette then led me through a small lobby with a white board announcing various activities for the day. We turned down a hallway and Jeanette ushered me into the building’s recreation room, a large tiled expanse with long rows of collapsible tables, metal folding chairs and glaring fluorescent lights. On one end was a small

kitchen, which I was to later learn residents were not allowed to use to actually make food, and on the other, seated around one of the tables, was a group of about five residents, waiting for me.

Our meeting did not go quite as I had planned. I was following the procedures I had used with other community gardens in Elmwood—contact the steward, do a standardized interview to find out basic information about the garden, and feel out willingness to participate in a case study. The gardeners at Towerview had other plans. I made it through my introduction, ending by asking if they had questions for me. They did, but not about the nature of my project; they wanted to know if I could help them. The garden at Towerview was quite large, but only a few residents made regular use of it. All the walking over uneven terrain and bending that traditional vegetable gardening required was too much physically for many of the apartment building's residents. The stewards, along with the other gardeners, wanted to pave a portion of the garden and put in more wheelchair accessible beds (there were currently only two, located along the sidewalk) (Figure 4.1). To complete this project, they needed to raise funds for supplies and find volunteer labor. I hesitated for a moment, mulling over what it would mean to accept their request. Setting aside concerns about how this project would impact my fieldwork (concerns that were to routinely come up as I became more and more involved), I agreed to help. We discussed their ideas and needs a little further, and I promised to return in a couple weeks after having thought over what exactly I could do.



Figure 4.1 *An example of a wheelchair accessible garden bed. All photos credited to author unless otherwise noted.*

Over the next year I learned a great deal about life at Towerview, and while the reputed crime and drug use did happen, it did not seem to do so with any greater frequency than other parts of Elmwood. Many of the assumptions Elmwoodites held about Towerview, I determined, were based primarily on ignorance, for the fact of the matter was few Elmwoodites knew exactly where Towerview was, and even fewer had actually visited the site. In fact, the city's director of public housing did not know where the apartment building was, a revelation that turned our light-hearted conversation at a community picnic in 2014 into a rather awkward exchange. While privately-owned, and thus not under his direct supervision, Towerview residents are exclusively recipients of Section 8 vouchers from the US and Michigan departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD),⁴² and the director's lack of basic knowledge was thus quite surprising.

That ordinary Elmwoodites did not know precisely where Towerview was, however, did not come as a surprise. One of two low-income apartment towers in the city, it was easily mixed

⁴² See Chapter 3, page 90, n.36 for a more complete description of this type of privatized public housing.

up with the other. Nor was the apartment complex, dedicated to the single-use of Section 8 residents, anywhere the average Elmwoodite would have reason to go. Further spatially isolated by traffic flows and land-use patterns, Towerview was removed from the daily life of most Elmwoodites. This socio-spatial arrangement had direct consequence for the daily lives of Towerview residents. While case workers did make visits to the building, residents, often with limited mobility and no access to private transportation, were otherwise expected to ‘take responsibility’ and find their way off-site to various public and private services scattered throughout the city, including health care, household shopping, and recreation. Indeed, a great deal of daily life at Towerview, as I observed it, centered around transportation, with activities organized around the shuttle to a nearby big box store, the bus schedule (there was a stop accessible from the building), and coordinating rides with the residents who did have cars. One resident who had hoped to participate in the regular afternoon workdays begun that spring had to decline because to make her weekly physical therapy appointment in the neighboring city she had to take three buses for a travel time of one-and-a-half hours. The drive in a private car would have been fifteen minutes, had she owned one.

Given these conditions, Jeanette, Peggy, and the other gardeners’ attitude toward the garden as a tool for improving life at Towerview, and their desires to increase its accessibility, made a great deal of sense. Minimal recreational activities were available to residents—there was a weekly shuttle to a shopping center and residents were eligible for reduced bus-fare. While the city’s senior center did offer free recreational programming to those over sixty-five, it was at least one bus ride, or a long uphill walk, away from Towerview. For those residents under sixty-five with disabilities, recreation was even more challenging; the nearest free services were a two-bus, forty-five minute, journey away in the neighboring city (the community center discussed in Chapter 4). Residents thus spent most of their time on-site, alone in their tiny one-bedroom apartments, playing cards or watching TV together in the rec room, or clustered together chatting around the ash trays just outside the front doors.

The eight-story apartment building, however, was set on a large grassy lot. The building's lawn, stretching away from the parking lot and bus stop, felt like part of a beautiful, peaceful park. Set amidst this lawn, the garden transformed an otherwise empty expanse of grass into a gathering place. Over the course of many workdays building wheelchair accessible beds and laying cement paving stones, I observed the ways the garden influenced Towerview residents' social interactions and their engagement with the outdoors. Those residents who did journey out into Elmwood on foot, to run errands or for a recreational walk, often traveled past the garden. Rachel walked every morning for her exercise, and though she did not stop to chat, she always smiled, waved, and remarked the progress on whatever project we were working on, and we gardeners enjoyed her regular presence. Several residents owned small dogs, and walked them around the picnic table that sat between the building and the garden. When we were out working the dog-walkers would come the extra few yards over to the garden to say hi and chat for a few minutes, which was often a welcome break from the day's tasks.

Then there were those residents like Anthony and Beryl, who came outside specifically to sit on the benches by the garden to enjoy the fresh air and socialize with any one out working. Anthony was a young, black, mentally-disabled man. Shy and uncertain, Anthony would come out to say hi and watch us garden. Despite our invitations, he never joined us, but would linger for a few minutes, watching and offering a stray comment or two. I cannot be certain, since I never spoke with him about it (he was always too shy to answer my questions), but Peggy believed he just liked the opportunity to come outside and be part of a group where people often stood around without talking. Beryl, on the other hand, was an elderly white woman with cataracts. She could no longer see well enough to garden, and missed the activity—before her landlord lost her home in the 2008 housing market collapse, Beryl had cultivated such magnificent flower gardens that reportedly people stopped their cars to get a better a look. Now she came out to water the garden's lone rose bush, sit on the bench, chat with the gardeners, and “feel the warm from the sun.”

Explaining the importance of the garden in a toast at a potluck to celebrate the end of the growing season in October 2014, Linda remarked, “before the garden, we didn’t have anything here at Towerview.” Had I heard her words in February, I might have thought them a bit overwrought, but by October, they seemed spot on. Certainly, the garden provided some members of this food-insecure community fresh, healthy produce, food that would otherwise be difficult and expensive to acquire. The garden did much more than provide a handful of residents with a means to care for themselves and their households, though. It provided both gardeners and residents like Rachel, Beryl, Anthony, and the dog-walkers with an opportunity to participate in an important form of community life. Rather than passing anonymously along the sidewalk or remaining cooped up indoors, the garden gave these residents a place, and a reason, to wave hello, to chat, to linger. In so doing it also provided a place for folks like Linda and Beryl, who sought opportunities to engage with nature, to experience the feel of sunlight or the smell of earth. In other words, the garden was an important way for at least some of the residents of Towerview to constitute themselves as a community. It provided a chance to work together for the good of all, providing a place to labor together or just simply share one another’s company. Through the garden residents were able to care for one another and to make their lives together more healthy and enjoyable.

The Tremont Community Garden

The Tremont Community Garden was similar to the garden at Towerview in several ways, including the emphasis on caring for community and the context of social and spatial inequality. Unlike Towerview, however, this garden was associated with an entire neighborhood. Sponsored by the neighborhood association (the Tremont Neighborhood Association, or TNA), this community garden faced far fewer struggles in terms of basic maintenance and accessibility as it drew participants from a larger and more diverse community.

Tremont was founded in Elmwood Township in the 1950s to supply housing for workers in nearby automotive production plants, one of which directly borders the neighborhood. The neighborhood was never segregated and has been a mixed-race, working class community from the start, though today it is majority African-American (73%); all the community gardeners in 2013-2014 were black, working-class residents of the neighborhood. Several of these gardeners, who had lived in the neighborhood for decades, reported that Tremont had changed over time though. “It [Tremont] reminded me of Detroit, the neighborhood I grew up in [during the 1950-60s],” Hope, the garden steward in 2014, told me, describing Tremont in the 1980s. “There was the same thing with trees along the streets, all these single-family homes, kids playing outside, and all the neighbors knew each other.” The neighborhood was changing by the 1990s though, as widespread factory lay-offs resulted in higher unemployment rates and falling household incomes, and increased out-migration from the neighborhood. That’s when the TNA was founded, according to Ms. Dolores, the garden’s previous steward, “to promote positive living and beautify the area so that people wanted to come and live in it.” However, the foreclosure crisis of 2008 and the closure of the nearby factories in the following years both undermined these efforts. Residents continued to face economic hard times, and many lost their homes. Cuts in social services, from unemployment insurance to community development block grants, also challenged residents’ abilities to make ends meet and improve the quality of life in their neighborhood.

At neighborhood association meetings residents, sheriff’s deputies, and township officials all complained that these vacant houses were frequently purchased by out-of-state investment firms and converted into rental units. They identified these absentee landlords, who reportedly did not maintain their properties in accordance with land use ordinances and failed to evict problem tenants, as one of the primary reasons for the neighborhood’s problems with blight and crime. Ms. Dolores, a retired autoworker, also traced the neighborhood’s struggles with upkeep and crime to a decrease in community involvement, resulting from the constraints working-class households faced in a postindustrial economy. Most people, she says, “they’re just trying to live. I grew up

with one job that supplied all I needed and now they say two or three jobs is what most people have to have, and you know that makes a big difference [in how much people can be involved in their community].” In casual conversations other residents shared similar stories about absentee landlords failing to maintain properties and residents working multiple jobs.

Within this context of social and economic disinvestment, the garden stands as a visible sign that residents like Hope and Ms. Dolores care about their community—they want everyone to have food security, for the neighborhood to be full of active residents, for properties to look “kept up,” and for children to have a safe place where they can learn how to grow food and become community members themselves. This big, 1200 square foot community garden is located at the Tremont Community Center (TCC) and sits about twenty feet from the sidewalk in the building’s front lawn, a colorful, hand-painted sign announcing its presence. Though the TCC includes nearly an acre of land and borders a park, the garden seldom felt quiet or isolated. The TCC is on the neighborhood’s main thoroughfare and there is a steady rush of cars driving by, as well as chatter from the bus stop and folks passing down the sidewalk, gave the place a hum of activity.

The garden itself is seldom so busy. Founded in 2005 through a partnership between the TNA, Showing Change, the Elmwood Township Parks & Recreation Department, and the Elmwood County Department of Health, the garden is now maintained by a handful (3-5) of volunteers from the neighborhood association. This small number of caretakers belies the reach of the garden. Unlike most community gardens, which are divided into small plots assigned to individual gardeners, the Tremont Community Garden is one large plot open to anyone who would like to come plant, weed, or harvest. This unusual arrangement of garden space is purposeful; “whether you participate or do anything putting it in there, you’re still welcome to come in and get some [veg] out of it,” explained Ms. Dolores in a 2011 interview. “All the planting’s on a volunteer basis, whoever’s willing to come out on that day . . . We’re a lot of black folk out here and we love greens, so we try to plant enough for everyone. And tomatoes—I

expect more people'll start coming 'cause the tomatoes are starting to get ripe." In this way care for the residents of Tremont has been woven into the very material organization and planting of the garden.

While the openness of the community garden was a meaningful symbolic gesture, exemplifying the neighborhood association members' belief that Tremont should be a place that is open to and nurturing of everyone, this way of caring for the community also had tangible material impacts for residents. As Ms. Dolores explained:

We're getting some of the things people need. Like, we have a couple people that are homeless or rely on little odd jobs around here and they really, really need that extra produce and stuff from the garden, and that helps 'em. 'Cause then they know now they're free to come, like I tell 'em. Just don't destroy it! But just keep comin'. You come and get anything out of there that you want. And I know one was taking it to somebody, another person. We have that a lot. Like I'll come up and I see a lot hasn't been picked or anything, especially when the tomatoes and stuff come in, I'll just pick it out and I know six or seven elderly and I'll go by and I'll just drop it off. So it helps.

In a neighborhood frequently classified as a "food desert,"⁴³ with 14% of residents living below the poverty line,⁴⁴ providing fresh vegetables was much needed work.

In addition to the neighborhood's homeless and elderly residents, Tremont's children were also beneficiaries of the garden. In a program that I worked with Ms. Dolores to found in

⁴³ According to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) a food desert is "an area in the United States with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such an area composed of predominantly lower income neighborhoods and communities," (Title VI, Sec. 7527) (USDA 2009). This broad definition neither defines what is meant by "limited access," nor references racial exclusion; the concept itself is subject to strident debate (see McEntee 2009; Short et al. 2007). Despite these problems, it is the standard definition adopted by those engaging with the concept and I follow that practice here. There are no grocery stores within Tremont, and foot traffic in and out of the neighborhood is restricted by the layout of surrounding roads. The neighborhood is serviced by one bus route. No data on rates of automobile ownership are available. By these criteria, as well as residents' own complaints about food access, those working on food security and justice issues in the region commonly classify Tremont as a 'food desert'.

⁴⁴ This is twice the county's poverty level, though comparable to the US level of 15%. Median incomes in Tremont are two-thirds the county median income and three-quarters the national median income.

2009 while I was an employee for Sowing Change, staff from this nonprofit used a dedicated section of the garden to teach the children how to plant, weed, and water, while discussing the importance of fresh fruits and vegetables to a healthy diet. Ms. Dolores and camp volunteers from the Foster Grandparent program often shared their experience gardening with the children and encouraged them to take produce home. I recall one day stuffing chard into the backpack of a little boy at the end of a camp day with the help of Carolina, a Foster Grandparent, while all three of us discussed our preferred method for cooking greens. (It was then that I learned, from this little boy who had been observing his mother, the trick of sticking greens in the freezer to get that much-prized subtle sweetness that comes from harvesting them after a frost.) Redistributing produce to homeless and elderly residents, educating children on how to grow and prepare food as their grandparents have done—these were all forms of care work made possible through the community garden.

Much like the Towerview Community Garden, the Tremont Community Garden also provided care for neighborhood residents through the ways it became a space for sociality. Its location by a main thoroughfare and bus stop meant lots of casual social interactions occurred while tending the garden. I had many a short conversation with residents waiting at the stop or just walking by, curious about what I was doing, wondering how to get involved, musing aloud about their grandmother's gardens. Ms. Dolores tried to turn these interactions into a recruitment tool: "If I get a chance and people are out at that bus stop, I say hey, you know this is a community garden. You know, a lot of them are interested and kinda looking, but just not knowing, so I spread the word." I am not sure if anyone has joined the community garden as a result of these chance encounters, but strangers became familiar faces, and curious onlookers learned about this community project.

More deep and enriching forms of social interaction occurred as well. Hope, the garden steward during my research period in 2014, whom I met at a neighborhood association meeting in March by way of introduction from Ms. Dolores, is a middle-aged African-American woman and

self-described city girl from Detroit who decided to take up gardening in 2012 out of a desire to eat healthy and exercise. “I’ve been battling [a chronic illness], and the doctors tell me all sorts of things, give me medications I don’t want to take. And a couple years ago I decided to try changing my diet. I ate more fresh foods and I felt better than I ever had since I got ill. The doctors wanted to know what I was doing!” Hope thought gardening would be a thrifty way to get more produce into her diet, and provide some gentle exercise, but she had never done it before. She joined the community garden in order to learn. “I’m hoping you can teach me” she said jokingly when we first met. I’m not sure how much useful gardening knowledge I imparted that season, but I did gain a new friend. We planted beans, hoed tomatoes, and harvested greens alongside each other. Together we would rest in the shade, our conversations wandering far afield. Over the summer Hope described her childhood in Detroit, her experience of the riot/rebellion in 1968 that drove her family to Elmwood, and always caught me up on the latest news and gossip in the neighborhood. In turn I shared what news I had from around town, my rather different experience growing up in rural Ohio, and my hopes for this project and my family.

Working in the garden with Hope became some of the most cherished time I spent in Elmwood. As Ms. Dolores, who frequently joined Hope and I in the garden said, “I tell you, it’s so much nicer to have somebody else in the garden with you at the same time. Because I can talk and find out what’s going on. It’s a difference that doesn’t happen as much.” Hope and I always texted each other when we planned to be at the garden, trying to make sure we would be there at the same times. Ms. Dolores opted for a more direct approach, often stopping to pick up a neighbor, particularly elderly residents she knew struggled to get out, and bringing them down to the garden with her. In this way, the garden became a key site and tool for these women to both establish and experience particular kinds of community relations.

Materializing Care in Contexts of Sociospatial Inequality

Both the examples of Towerview and Tremont demonstrate the ways care, enacted through gardening, can be mobilized through collective projects to attend to the well-being of those beyond the household, specifically for community-members and neighbors. In so doing, these gardeners also find themselves in relationships with various other human and nonhuman beings. At Towerview, the community gardeners were laboring together to create a shared space that provided healthy, affordable fresh food along with a site for outdoor recreation and socialization. In the process these gardeners got to know their neighbors, as fellow residents came outside and took advantage of this pleasant place to pass the time, and fostered the kinds of relationships to nature, based on restorative experience, that many valued but few had the means to pursue. The Tremont community gardeners were also engaged in the work of turning a physical space into a site of care for neighborhood residents and their community life by incorporating this care into the very material organization and social management of the garden. By materially inserting care work via collective social labor into otherwise unutilized grassy public lawns, the Towerview and Tremont gardeners made tangible a claim for the value of outdoor community spaces. Like vegetables gardeners in Toronto appropriating public park space for the provision of community food security (Wekerle 2005), or impoverished residents of Sao Paulo utilizing the spaces of citizenship and state power like public buildings (Holston 2009), these community gardeners disrupted their neighborhood environments and the narratives of uncaring, undeserving residents that had formed around them.

Moreover, it was the everyday experience of these environments that generated such claims. For on a day-to-day basis the gardeners on Towerview and Tremont encountered the ways Elmwood had come to be shaped by sociospatial inequalities based on differences of class and race. The Tremont neighborhood historically came to be through a convergence of industrial labor practices and race- and class-based social stratification. Factory work was available to everyone after World War II, making possible home ownership and a certain standard of

working-middle class living for the many white and black migrants from the rural American South who arrived in Michigan seeking work. However, formal and informal discrimination in housing and employment opportunities concentrated these new arrivals in select locations (Massey and Denton 1993; Sugrue 1996). As labor and housing markets shifted in the late twentieth century, these concentrations of working class and/or African-American residents were the most vulnerable and their neighborhoods the most destabilized (Georgakas and Surkin 1975; Hamer 2011; Thomas 1997). Likewise, the concentration of poor elderly and/or disabled residents in a spatially-isolated apartment complex like Towerview is the result of the privatization of public housing provision through Section 8 vouchers and the market-driven solutions that have emerged in response, specifically a displacement of these residents to cheap land and specialized private housing providers.

The Tremont and Towerview Community Gardens were one response to these sociospatial inequalities. They were forms of care that attempted to “make do” (Caldwell 2004), creatively assembling available resources, such as land and expertise, to meet the neighborhoods’ needs. In other words, these gardens represent efforts by Towerview and Tremont residents to care for themselves where state and society have not. These gardeners worked tirelessly to sustain their gardens because they “didn’t have anything” and “people don’t get cared for.” Their commitments to their neighbors and their desires for mutual well-being and a pleasant living environment motivated them to create these collective gardening projects and keep them going. In other words, their everyday experiences of race and class generated ethical commitments toward others that were materialized in the physical space of the garden. Furthermore, both anthropologists (Ghannam 2002; Low 2000; Zhang 2008) and scholars of community gardening projects (DeLind 2011; White 2011) have argued that acts of producing and occupying material spaces also generate particular kinds of sociality and belonging. Through little acts of conversation, chatting with passers-by, and calling on neighbors for companionship and assistance, gardeners like Hope, Ms. Dolores, Peggy, and Jeanette extended care to their

communities. In so doing, these gardeners demonstrated a form of tangible agency in the face of race- and class-based sociospatial inequality by providing a physical site where community members might create different ways of living, ones that nurtured conviviality and greater equity. As I take up in the following section, these sites also created possibilities for different kinds of relationships to nonhumans as well.

Care for Ecosystems

The Hilltop Community Garden: Care for Human and Nonhuman Beings

Echinacea. Rudbekia. Bee balm. Cat mint. Goldenrod. From the first blooms of spring until the killing frosts of late fall the Hilltop Community Garden was encircled by a riotous border of flowers. While many of the species growing in a jumble of irregular clumps can be found growing wild in southeastern Michigan, these plantings were very purposeful and well-managed. As one passes by they are struck by these flowers' bright colors and spicy-sweet aromas, a rather intentional sensory impact.

The garden is in a well trafficked area and the flower border creates a pleasant sensory experience, visually and aromatically, for passersby, contributing to the positive reputation of the Hilltop Community Garden throughout the city. Founded in 2005 by a group of residents from the Hilltop neighborhood, the adjacent middle-class neighborhood, the garden employs a traditional, individually rented plot structure. It is highly regarded throughout the city as an exemplary community resource and for its dual commitments to providing residents with accessible gardening space and using organic and ecologically sustainable growing methods.

Moving in closer, though, another purpose to the flower border becomes discernible. The plants thrum with insect activity; this is pollinator habitat. There are many types of plants that would provide an aesthetically pleasing garden border, but these species had been specifically selected for their favorability among bees, butterflies, and other pollinating insects. Blooms are long-lasting and the species flower at different times throughout the year, not all at once. I gained

an intimate knowledge of this flower border in early May 2014, just as it was coming to life. Nearly all of the gardeners had gathered on this, the citywide clean-up day, to tidy up the garden in preparation for spring planting. Tasks included pulling out the noxious, invasive, or otherwise undesirable plants that had crept into the flower border. Hunched under a bench digging out taproots with a zeal only frustrated purpose can bring, I got to know Hannah, an active member of the garden since its founding. Together we forged our own camaraderie as we worked amidst the honeybees and butterfly bushes to remove a particularly intractable weed known as bindweed, creating our own momentary lexicon of salty insults for this reviled plant.

As a border this ring of flowers mediated between the community garden and the broader public. As a thing of beauty, a habitat, and a product of shared labor, the flower border realized the community gardeners' commitments to caring for themselves and other human and nonhuman beings. First was gardeners' care of the flower border itself; weeds and other pests must be kept in check. In exchange, the plants produced blooms. These flowers in turn enabled the Community Park community gardeners to work toward the mutual well-being of each other, their neighbors, and pollinator species. The sights and smells of the flowers fulfilled passersby's' desires for a pleasing sensory experience and encouraged them to think highly of the garden. The blooms also enticed pollinating insects, providing them with much needed nectar and habitat.⁴⁵ By laboring together on the flower border the gardeners generated the public goodwill and plant pollination they needed for their garden to be successful. Through these flowering plants, their ecosystems, and the space they occupied, gardeners' acts of care brought them in to relations with all kinds of human and nonhuman beings.

⁴⁵ Both wild and managed pollinating insect populations, particularly honeybees, have become increasingly threatened due to pesticide use, increased prevalence of disease and parasites (tied to rising temperatures and changes in weather patterns resulting from climate change), habitat loss, and increasing monocultures (which necessarily bloom at the same time and thus do not provide nectar sources throughout the year) (see the 2016 International Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report on pollination, www.ipbes.net/work-programme/pollination). These insects are, however, necessary for life on earth as they facilitate the pollen exchange required for plant reproduction; in particular, honeybees play an important roll in the pollination of human agricultural crops in industrial as well as organic agriculture. Efforts like the Hilltop Community Garden flower border are intended to bolster flagging pollinator populations by providing the diverse, pesticide-free nectar sources they require.

Gardening and beekeeping are always multispecies relationships of care, a statement that would elicit little protest from anyone who has gardened or kept bees. Even at its most instrumental and reductive, a gardener must at least tend to the needs of the plant, a beekeeper their bees. Most of the gardeners and beekeepers I spoke with had a more holistic conception though, including other plants, insects and other animals, bacteria, and fungi to varying degrees within the realm of what must be tended, or attended to. As Maria, a Hilltop community gardener, put it one September afternoon in 2014 as we chatted casually during a work-day break, “If you think about it, all gardening [or beekeeping] is a kind of collaboration with nature.” Citing the role of sun, rain, other living beings, Maria mused, “Gardening isn’t something you can really do by yourself.”

In addition to her participation in the Hilltop Community Garden, Maria, a white, working-middle class woman, is also a prominent beekeeper in the city. Maria is the grandchild of European immigrants, some of whom got by as street-based vegetable vendors. Her grandfather was an avid gardener, and Maria remembers helping him in his garden as a child. Though her mother did not garden herself, Maria recalls how important the extra produce from her grandfather’s garden was in making ends meet in a single-parent household. When her grandfather passed away, Maria inherited some of his gardening tools, which prompted her to take up gardening. Reflecting on the meaning of gardening to her in a conversation in 2017, Maria stated that gardening made her feel connected, to her family history and cultural heritage, as well as to nature in all its complexity. And this sense of connectedness she feels empowered, a part of something larger than herself.

Through gardening Maria also learned of the important ecological role of honeybees and developed a strong attachment to these insects, which she described to me in an interview in early 2014. “When I think of all the bees have done for me, for everyone,” Maria’s voice trembled during our 2013 interview and her hand rested over her heart as she explained why she started beekeeping, “I just have to do something for them.” She currently practiced organic gardening

with an emphasis on herbs and other flowering species, and a very low-intervention style of honeybee hive management.⁴⁶ These choices of gardening and beekeeping techniques were directly related to the deep empathy she experienced for honeybees and her sense of connection to nature. This emotional attachment was evident in the tears that came to her eyes as she described Colony Collapse Disorder⁴⁷ or her adamant refusal to let university researchers catch and kill honeybees from the Hilltop Community Garden as part of a scientific study on their genetic diversity. Honeybees are arguably necessary for human being's existence on earth, and by caring for them through her gardening and beekeeping practices Maria recognized that all life is a multispecies collaboration.

Though Maria is perhaps more attuned to the collaborative nature of gardening and beekeeping than most, she was nevertheless right. Gardening requires practitioners to enter into relationships with a wide range of nonhuman beings, as well as atmospheric and geophysical forces like weather and planetary movement. A gardener relies on soil, rain, and pollinating insects, among other beings and natural phenomena, to successfully grow their plants. While Maria spoke of these interdependencies in rather poetic language, they find their realization in the rather workaday *doing* of gardening—selecting crops, weeding, watering, etc. Thus, just as discussed in the examples of Towerview and Tremont, gardens are spaces of relationality. For Maria, those relationships encompass not only her fellow gardeners, but also, like the gardeners of Tremont, a connection to family history and cultural heritage. For Maria and many eco-

⁴⁶ The beekeepers I worked with in Elmwood, including Maria, were fond of saying that honeybees were not domesticated animals, but rather wild animals one husbanded and managed. In the world of beekeeping, management techniques varied along a continuum from very low to very high intervention in the natural functioning of the hive. High intervention techniques are based on an approach to beekeeping that seeks to mimic as closely as possible livestock agriculture; hives are designed for ease of access and to maximize honey production and bees are “fed” and given medication as deemed necessary by the beekeeper, among other forms of intervention. Low intervention techniques, on the other hand, seek to follow as closely as possible the natural proclivities of honeybees. Beekeepers intervene as little possible in the life of the hive, and often choose hive designs which allow bees to build comb as they would in the wild. All of the beekeepers with whom I interacted in Elmwood used low-intervention style management techniques.

⁴⁷ Colony Collapse Disorder is a term used to refer to the sudden and complete collapse of a hive, either through death or simply vanishing (presumed dead). It is believed to be caused by several different factors, including mites, viruses, and pesticides (http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/honey_bee_update_and_fruit_pollination).

conscious gardeners like her, the relationality of gardening also, significantly and rather explicitly, extends to nonhuman beings as well.

Dylan: Caring Commitments

And just as it is daily life in a neighborhood shaped (in part) by the shared experience of unequal access to recreational green space that gives rise to Tremont and Towerview gardeners' desires to care for their communities, so too does the everyday experience of interdependence on nature give rise among some gardeners to an ethical commitment to the ecosystems of which they are a part. When asked why she kept bees, chickens, and a backyard garden, one Elmwoodite responded simply, "I want to be part of a solution." These gardeners and beekeepers believed that people, plants, insects, and more could all live well together, in the close space of the garden patch and in the vastness of earth's ecosystems. Gardens and beehives became ways for Elmwoodites to express and fulfill these commitments, tools for working out what living well with human and nonhuman beings might be like.⁴⁸ As practices of care, gardening and beekeeping were concerned with maintaining relationships, to plants, bees, and other beings. While Tronto (1993) cautions that this focus on maintenance often gives care a conservative dimension, it also implies an orientation toward the future, which is underscored in gardening and beekeeping. To successfully tend a garden or beehive, one must consider the weather tomorrow, the ripening of vegetables and blooming of flowers over weeks and months, the rise and fall of temperatures across seasons, the persistence of soil nutrients over years, the sequential production of new generations of beings. In other words, gardening and beekeeping encourage their practitioners to consider the *when* of well-being, as well as the *how*. This adds a dimension of temporality to care relations, as gardeners wrestle with how to realize the mutual well-being of themselves and other humans and nonhumans in the present moment and into the future. Thus care, enacted through gardening and beekeeping, must be considered both in terms of ethical

⁴⁸ See also the art work of Lois Weinberger (www.loisweinberger.net; c.f. Myers 2016).

commitments to human and nonhuman beings and in regard to the time horizons over which those commitments operate. This temporal dimension to gardening came through in interviews when I asked gardeners, like Dylan, to tell me about what impacts they thought their activities had on the broader community, beyond just themselves and their households.

I met Dylan through the Hilltop Facebook page, where he was known for being a bit of a character. Character is perhaps not the best description, as it implies a degree of eccentricity. Dylan was not eccentric, just enthusiastic. From colorful literary posts describing a walk through the neighborhood to good-natured trivia-night related trash talk, Dylan, who worked in IT and found online conversation comfortable and important, enthusiastically participated in the life of his community. Nor was his participation limited to the online world; he volunteered actively with the neighborhood association and participated in the city's time bank. He was also an avid backyard gardener.

Dylan volunteered to participate in my project in response to a solicitation for participants on the aforementioned Facebook page. We met "IRL" for the first time at a downtown coffeeshop, sitting down to talk over lunch one late summer afternoon in 2014. Dylan's large frame and brash manner were undercut by a tenderness and enthusiastic sincerity that quickly turned an awkward first meeting into a pleasurable conversation. Dylan, a middle-aged man, identified as mixed White and Native American and was proud of his upbringing on a rural Southern farm. He grew up growing and preserving his own food and these experiences motivated him to continue growing vegetables and herbs in a large (200 square feet) backyard garden at the home he owns with his wife.

Well, being on the farm, you have all of your food already, especially if you know how to can and preserve. You don't really look outside for any help. . . And that just makes so much sense, to know how to help yourself, and that's what I want. Especially for my son as he gets older, that he knows it's not something that's separate from us. You don't go to a store, it's here in the earth. To be a part of that and to nurture something that can then

nurture you, I like that cycle. And also there's so much we don't really account for when we go to the store to buy our food, like the gas that we use, the pollution that we cause, the taxes that we pay, the corporations that we're funding by buying what they sell, the pesticides, the ingredients they don't have to tell us about. All of those are eliminated if you grow your own food.

Dylan considers gardening to be an important practice of care as it preserves traditional knowledge, generates household self-sufficiency, educates children, and tends to the well-being of ecosystems and their multispecies members. As he explained why growing his own food was important to him, Dylan also articulated a critique of the current political economy of food in the United States, all that “we don't really account for when we go to the store,” and a sense of responsibility to participate differently in that political economy.

This sense of responsibility, too, is rooted in care, stemming from a set of ethical commitments Dylan felt to the well-being of his family as well as agricultural ecosystems, to the past as well as the future. Dylan described his participation in the local March Against Monsanto,⁴⁹ and I pressed him to tell me more about his anti-corporation activism. “For a long time I've been very leery of what these huge conglomerations are doing and when they started to target the food source,” —here Dylan references farm buy outs, gene patenting, and self-destruct genes⁵⁰— “The level that they went into the food system to make sure it became a system instead of just food made me [agitated pause], my feelings are just too great to even express.” Dylan spat out these last words, his throat tight as he tried to remain calm. We paused a moment to allow

⁴⁹ March Against Monsanto is a worldwide grassroots organization protesting the lack of regulation for genetically modified organisms (GMO) in the food system, gene patenting, and revolving doors between agrifood corporations and US regulatory bodies (www.march-against-monsanto.com). The organization sponsors an annual worldwide march.

⁵⁰ Farm buy-outs refers to the ongoing concentration of farmland ownership, where fewer and fewer individuals own increasingly large farms, made possible by buying out smaller farms unable to turn a profit due to economies of scale. Gene patenting refers to the controversial practice of patenting biological genes, with patent rights going to the individual or corporation responsible for identification in the lab. Self-destruct genes refer to a type of genetically-modified organism which does not produce a second-generation; this is done by seed-corporations who do not want farmers to be able to save seeds and propagate the corporations' purportedly-owned genetic material.

him to collect himself before I continued, “I’m getting the sense you feel really strongly about things like environmental stewardship and food sovereignty.”

“Yes, very much so.”

“Why?”

Well, it’s never been done before. And we haven’t—not Monsanto, but humanity—has not shown a good track record of forward thinking. We are very like, this works today, and there might be some side effects, and we’ll worry about them later. And you would think that some of the most insane things that ever happened on earth ecologically would have triggered us into being like, we don’t want to do that.

Dylan offered the example of the Great Dust Bowl⁵¹ as one such “insane ecological happening” and discussed US agriculture’s continued commitment to monoculture despite this tragedy. “It’s not even stewardship. It’s survival. And everyone’s instinct is turned off for some reason.” For Dylan, gardens are about survival—current industrial agricultural practices feed people today, but are destroying ecosystems for tomorrow. By growing his own food and publicly protesting industrial agricultural practices, Dylan attempted to care for his household and the agricultural ecosystems on which they depended, thinking long-term and seeking ways to nurture a livable future, one where the search for well-being recognized ecological interconnectedness.

In her work on soil science and care, Puig de la Bellacasa (2015) also references the Great Dust Bowl as an example of ecological disaster, wrought by the temporalities of technoscientific agricultural practices that displace the future in the urgency of the present. Recent developments that emphasize soil as a living ecosystem, she argues, have challenged these temporalities. As a living thing on which humans are interdependent, Puig de la Bellacasa draws attention to methods of food production that hold soil should be cared for, which means attending

⁵¹ The Great Dust Bowl occurred during the 1930s in the Great Plains of North America when a series of droughts, coupled with the rapid mechanization of farming and reliance on monocropped grains resulted in extensive soil erosion (dry, exposed soil blown away as dust) and caused crop failure, resulting in many families abandoning their farms and migrating away from the plains.

to the cyclical and long-term timescales on which its ecosystems operate. Such an awareness is evident as Dylan critiques contemporary industrial agricultural practice and describes the kinds of understandings he derives from gardening and desires for his son.

Similar to James, who gardened as a way to prepare his household for precarious futures in the face of social and ecological change, Dylan used gardening to care for his household and ecosystems, realizing that these ethical commitments extend to time horizons beyond the here and now. Unlike James, who eschewed community involvement and identification with social trends, Dylan believed he was not alone in this work and recognized himself as part of a community that also sought to live well amidst the effects of deindustrialization and the threats posed by global climate change. Dylan has lived in many places in the United States and traveled around the world. While he has great respect for certain Japanese ways of life—when asked in what ways he would transform Elmwood, he responded “I’d make it more like Japan”—Elmwood, with its “low-key, quirky energy,” was clearly a special place to him. “There’s not a lot of community activity [in America]. It’s degraded into this very independent, freedom based, stay home and do what I want [place]. And this town just doesn’t seem to adhere to that. They will have a little gathering and suddenly everyone’s there,” he says, proffering examples of a guitar concert at a local restaurant and impromptu bike rides amongst neighborhood children.

Dylan did not see his efforts to be an active part of his community and to live in ecologically sustainably as separate projects. When I asked what role he saw for home and community gardens in Elmwood’s future, he responded by musing on the ways gardens could strengthen neighborly relations, concluding uncertainly, “You just don’t know what they will do for you and what it can do for the community until it’s done.” Just as planting a seed holds the hope of something to come amidst the uncertainty of rainfall, pests, and other variables, Dylan’s gardening practices held the hope of future well-being for his family, ecosystems, and community. Amidst ruin, Dylan sensed a future of living well together was possible (Tsing 2015), and used gardening to enact his ethical commitments to that future.

Collaborative, Multispecies Relations of Care

In many ways gardening and beekeeping epitomize the interpretation of care as a form of tinkering posited by Mol et al. (2010); gardeners and beekeepers are always in the process of figuring out how to fulfill their ethical obligations to the well-being of numerous humans and nonhumans, whether through creating more wheelchair accessible gardening space or planting a floral, pollinator and people friendly garden border. Furthermore, these are processes that unfold in time, as gardeners reference the practices of their grandparents and claim cultural heritage through their activities, as they respond to plants, people, and pests, and they respond back. This reliance on communicative feedback in order to maintain a relationship over time is a key component to caring (Buch 2015), and also a reminder that relations of care seek mutual well-being within the relationship, not optimal outcomes for individuals. There is always give and take and often settling for the livable (Jarvis 2005; Tronto 1993). In the realm of multispecies relationships, this can mean killing one plant, say bindweed, for the sake of another, or thwarting the needs of small, furry mammals.⁵² Other times it means, as in the case of Hilltop Community Garden's flower border, finding creative ways for humans and nonhumans to live together. As Martin et al. (2015) caution, care is not always a pleasant business (see also Han 2012). It entails making strategic choices about how to maintain relationships with plants, people, and pollinating species. These enactments of care are processes, active and ongoing, as gardeners, beekeepers, plants, and insects discover together what constitutes their mutual well-being (cf. Haraway 2008; Tsing 2015).

⁵² These relationships are also evocative of what Haraway (2008) terms "mortal companionship," a kind of "learning to be 'polite' in responsible relation to always asymmetrical living and dying, and nurturing and killing (42)." Elmwood gardeners' relationships to woodchucks are exemplary of this. Woodchucks were a ubiquitous pest (the most common response I received to the interview question, "Do you have any questions for me?" was, "Do you know how to humanely deal with woodchucks?"), and gardeners tried all manner of strategies to deal with them, from various DIY repellants to live-traps. While most live-trapped woodchucks were peacefully relocated to wooded areas outside of town, I know of at least one that ended up in a stew, and another dispatched with a spade (by one of the most gentle and peaceful men I know)—mortal companionship indeed.

Considering gardening and beekeeping as practices of care, requiring strategic decisions within constraints, also draws attention to just exactly what constraints gardeners face and how these come to be. For gardeners like Doris, focused on household care, these constraints included available free time and tight household budgets, negotiation of which led Doris to couple home gardening with shopping at the local farmers' market. For community gardeners, like those in Tremont, Hilltop, and Towerview, care work included negotiating the occasionally competing needs of people for pleasant outdoor recreational space, pollinating insects for a variety of nectar sources, vegetables for a hospitable habitat, and gardeners for an accessible growing space. Gardeners like Dylan, James, and Maria, who were also focused on the ways their gardening contributed to ecological sustainability and climate change mitigation, frequently found themselves confounded by the lack of institutional investment in solutions to what they perceived as a dire, existential threat, and negotiated this through commitments to their gardening and beekeeping practices. For poor and working-class gardeners and gardeners of color, the constraints negotiated as they enacted care for others also included systematic disinvestment in social service provision, such as housing and transportation for elderly and disabled citizens, and historic processes of race- and class-based discrimination that concentrated these residents in particular neighborhoods. As a result, gardeners in sites like Tremont and Towerview also had to negotiate a lack of material resources and residents' often diminished capacities to participate in collective projects, as well as particularly urgent needs for fresh, healthy food and outdoor community space, processes not without precedent in the histories of both black Southern migrants and working-class European immigrants.

Moreover, attention to such constraints—be they household economics, a lack of coherent national climate change policy, or institutional disinvestment in public green space—prompts consideration of gardeners' embeddedness within particular histories, communities, and ecosystems. For it is in their everyday lives as members of families, communities, and ecosystems that gardeners experience the consequences of tight budgets and inadequate policies,

and in sharing these experiences with other human and nonhuman beings, become motivated to care for them. In other words, it is the everyday, embodied experience of living in relation to others, past and present, under particular conditions of inequality and disinvestment, that gives rise to the ethical commitments enacted through gardening. It is the labor of gardening that both enacts and further generates desires to care for households, communities, and ecosystems.

Furthermore, these emerging ethical commitments, expressed and concretized in the space of the garden, engender the possibility of different sorts of relationships between people and their environments. Gardening brings practitioners into collaborative relationships with an array of human and nonhuman beings and the complex workings of local and global ecosystems. These relationships with insects, garden pests, soil microfauna, with neighbors, family histories, and cultural heritage, challenge gardeners to expand their spheres of care. Maria began growing her own food in order to embrace her own personal history and family heritage, but found these efforts brought her into much more intimate and urgent relations of care with honeybees.

Similarly, Dylan's use of gardening as a way to fulfill his ethical commitments to the mutual well-being of his family, community, and ecosystems has required him to consider the temporality of those commitments. In their efforts to secure funding and volunteer labor, the gardeners of Towerview roped in one anthropologist and made a greater number of their fellow Elmwoodites aware of their lives and their garden. By creating a garden that is organizationally and operationally premised on the collective meeting of one another's needs, the Tremont community gardeners disrupted the construction of themselves as solely self-interested actors and reinforced a shared commitment to the social body and life of the neighborhood. In her study of middle-class, environmentally-conscious Swedish consumers, Isenhour (2010) argues that it is important to acknowledge the concerns for "distant Others," [be they human or nonhuman,] that motivate individuals' choices. These concerns, she contends, can form the basis for more politically engaged efforts to stem the rate of global climate change and mitigate its social and ecological impacts. As the ecosystems on which we as humans, and our companions (cf. Haraway

2008), depend and the socioeconomic relationships that shape our everyday lives evince ever greater precarity and inequity, this ability to stretch our spheres of care to include neighbors and nonhuman beings, and our shared future becomes increasingly crucial.

Neither gardening nor beekeeping are panaceas, tools for calling forth future utopias. Like all practices of care they entail negotiating conflict and constraint for the sake of maintaining a relationship. Gardening and beekeeping bring practitioners into open-ended, at times collaborative relations with all kinds of humans and nonhumans—household members, neighbors, community members, soil microfauna, insects, small mammals, and the list goes on. Caught up in the lives of these various beings, gardeners and beekeepers must sort out who and what is to be cared for, making strategic, sometimes difficult decisions about what their mutual well-being might be like, both now and into the future. These are decisions that, while predicated in an ethic of care, must account for desires and constraints that are shaped by differing experiences of class and race. To care via gardening as a white, middle-class Elmwoodite is a different experience than to do so as a black, working-class resident of Tremont, and as I will discuss in Chapters 6 and 7, these differences matter in the ways race- and class-based inequalities continue to shape life in Elmwood. Yet, while gardening and beekeeping do not ensure a good life, they do provide practices for experimenting with what living well together might be like under present and future socioeconomic and ecological conditions. Following Fischer's (2014) construction, these activities help both secure the material bases of life and provide opportunities for Elmwoodites to aspire and work toward forms of urban life that generate greater social equity and ecological sustainability.

In Chapter 6 I consider the ways Elmwoodites use gardening and beekeeping to advance these ends, addressing exactly what kinds of environments and relations to other human and nonhuman beings that seek to achieve through their activities. Before turning to this discussion, however, it is important to unpack what it is about gardening that leads some Elmwoodites from the everyday experience of embeddedness within community and ecosystem to ask, what kind of

environment do I desire for myself and others, and to take up action toward such ends. In the following chapter I argue this move is predicated on the fact that gardening is a form of physical labor that brings one into tangible contact with the material world. Thus, I move to frame gardening as a form of creative, material labor and consider the implications of this experience for engendering care for urban environments and those that inhabit them.

Chapter 5: The Materiality of Gardening Matters, or Vegetable Gardening as Creative, Material Labor

In my interviews with people, I always asked them to tell me about the benefits of gardening, leaving the question as open-ended as possible. Typically, a gardener would start by talking about how great it was to have fresh food and outdoor exercise in a somewhat perfunctory if enthusiastic way. Then, for many of the gardeners I spoke with, their tone would shift, growing somehow both wistful and solemn. They would begin to describe the pleasure they found in physically handling plants and soil and in the experience of laboring outdoors. They would speak with a simultaneous pride and awe of how they felt in seeing a seed become a plant become a meal. In this regard the words of Jane, a white, middle-working-class vegetable gardener in Orchard Park are exemplary: “I think putting your hands in the dirt and doing the whole process of seeing the baby seeds come up, seeing the plant grow, that’s a connection with the basics of life if you really start thinking about it.”

What Jane’s statement, and the many gardeners who echoed her sentiments, remind us is that vegetable gardening is a type of sensual, physical engagement with the material world. From sore muscles to dirt under the fingernails to meditative weeding, the doing of gardening requires people to move their bodies, touch the earth, alter the physical landscape. Gardeners taste and smell, as well as see. They observe the passing of time in the growth of their plants and reckon with the material needs of non-human beings in such figures as pollinating insects or hungry rodents. Knowing when to plant, when to water, when to harvest all require being attuned to the passing of the earth’s seasons, to patterns in the weather, and to changes in both global and local ecology. This tangible materiality is a key part of what brings gardeners satisfaction, for the manual labor gardening entails is also an act of nurturing a plant and all its potentialities into being, of creating, in collaboration with nature, beauty and sustenance.

These acts of creation were meaningful to gardeners in deeply personal, affective ways,⁵³ but also gained further significance when gardeners considered them within the broader social and economic context of contemporary capitalism. Rose, a local historian and avid home gardener, articulated a common sentiment among the gardeners I spoke with, though perhaps more forcefully than most, when she concluded an email to me regarding historic forms of gardening in Elmwood by reflecting on her own gardening practices: “Growing my own food and flowers is a way to grasp and value the past and say, with the small but concrete statement of a rudbeckia or a Stump of the World heirloom tomato that I grew from seed, that I disagree with rampant consumerism, debt, superficiality, packaging, disposable culture.” In her words, and those of Elmwoodites with similar sentiments, was a direct condemnation of American consumer culture, on the grounds of both its ecological and social impacts. In these critiques gardeners recounted experiences of alienation, from their labor, urban space, and food systems. Their narratives resonate with the extensive scholarship on alienation and contemporary capitalism.⁵⁴ This work has discussed the ways consumption-based economies in the US have reordered the materiality and experience of urban space (Zukin 1991, 2008, 2009); the ways experiences of alienation are intensified through both global commodity flows and affective labor (Appadurai 1996; Hochschild 2012; Isenhour 2011b; LiPuma 2005); and the ways industrialized food production and consumption have disconnected the majority of Americans and Europeans from a key material basis of life (Alkon 2013; Kneafsey et al. 2008; Lyson 2004). These scholars have also addressed how inequalities based on differences such as race and class shape experiences of

⁵³ There is a small but growing literature on the affective relationships between people and plants. Affect is understood here, and in this literature, as a type of precognitive responding, typically rendered linguistically through the language of emotion, that occurs in relation to another being (Massumi 1995). See for example Archambault 2016; Hustak and Myers 2012. In this chapter I focus on the significance of these deeply personal, felt relationships to the material world within a context of alienation and desire to reconnect. However, these affective responses to plants and soil are also arguably an important part of why gardening is so personally meaningful to gardeners. I do not have the data to further explore this dimension of gardening practice, and further research is warranted.

⁵⁴ In using the term “alienation” I refer to both the Marxist sense in which one does not control the products of one’s labor, as well as a broader understanding (following the narratives of research participants) that also references a lack of control over the production of urban space and the assemblage of food systems, and a sense of undesired detachment from social and political life.

alienation, and drawn attention to the ways these economic relations result in the rampant depletion of material resources and degradation of ecosystems (Wilk 2001).

While the consumption of local and “green” commodities has gained increasing traction as a way out of this socioecological bind, commentators have cautioned that these new forms of production and consumption do not necessarily alter the social and economic structures that created problems of social inequality, alienation, and ecological unsustainability in the first place (Bryant 2004; Isenhour 2011a; Janssen 2010; Lyon 2011). As proponents of degrowth like Latouche (2009) and Schor and Thompson (2014) have argued, if greater social equity, authenticity, and ecological sustainability require, among other things, consuming (and producing) less, it is imperative that those in consumption-based societies like the United States find other sources of social and cultural meaning, derived from creative, generative acts.⁵⁵ Vegetable gardeners, with their dirty hands and proudly homegrown produce, suggest one site where ordinary people are exploring such alternative meanings. Thus, in this chapter I present gardening as a form of creative, material labor, one which requires relationships to other human and nonhuman beings. Through these relationships, I argue, gardeners come to consider themselves actively involved in the making of their urban environments and experience a sense of reconnection to the material bases of life.

To pursue this argument, I follow two parallel organizational schemes in this chapter, one focused on the types of alienation and reconnection different gardeners experienced, and the other addressing the ways inequalities based on differences of class, race, and ability shaped and were shaped by these experiences. I begin by discussing the ways one middle-working-class couple used vegetable gardening to reconnect to their labor by rendering their front lawn an aesthetic as well as edible environment, exploring new livelihood possibilities, and generating sociality in

⁵⁵ Which is not to say that consumption is intrinsically bad. I agree with Miller (2001) that efforts to curb consumption in contemporary society must acknowledge the deeply meaningful and generative aspects of consumption behavior, and the role consumption necessarily plays in any society, ecologically sustainable or not.

their neighborhood. Their experience is paired with that of a middle-class Latina woman who reflected on what it means to do the creative work of gardening in partnership with nonhuman beings as a way to reconnect to urban space and nature. Together I use these two examples to investigate how gardening, as a creative material project, is influenced by processes of class formation as considered through the lens of urban land use aesthetics. In the second half of the chapter I shift to narratives about the social and political implications of gardening as creative project. I begin with one young black woman's story of growing food as a process of reclaiming skills and about how the act of creating a flourishing garden is a form of reconnection to one's food systems. I conclude with the story of a disabled woman's struggle to design and implement universally accessible gardens, creating spaces and practices that included everyone, regardless of ability, in a kind of unified form of reconnection to labor, urban space, and food systems. I bring these final two examples together to demonstrate the ways these women coupled their narratives of reconnection through gardening to explicit political projects deriving from their experiences of race and disability, through the lens of food sovereignty. In juxtaposing the experiences of a diverse array of gardeners I aim to show the various ways these individuals experienced alienation and reconnection within contexts of inequality based on differences of class, race, and ability, and how these experiences engendered a sense of themselves as active producers of their environments.

Creative Projects and Classed Land Use Aesthetics 1: Reconnecting to Labor

I met Bill and Jane in the early spring of 2014. I was observing a training for community garden groups hosted by Sowing Change, and the couple attended as part of the Orchard Park Yard and Garden Club (OPYGC). Founded in the fall of 2013 by Orchard Park residents, including Bill and Jane, the purpose of this club was to encourage neighborhood beautification and provide a social opportunity for flower and vegetable gardeners. I was intrigued by the opportunity to work with a garden project in its beginning stages and over the course of the training I introduced myself to

the group and tried to learn as much about their club as possible. At the potluck lunch celebrating the end of the course I approached Bill and Jane to ask if the OPYGC would be interested in participating in my research project. The couple said yes and invited me to the next monthly OPYGC meeting. Nervous despite their friendly invitation, I showed up at the Orchard Park Elementary School a couple weeks later as suggested. My anxieties about being welcome were quickly alleviated by a warm introduction from Bill and Jane and the good-natured cheer with which the rest of the group welcomed me. Over the next nine months I was to get to know this band of eight to ten home gardeners (membership in the group was fluid), participate in several of their neighborhood beautification and fundraising projects, and visit three members' flower and vegetable home gardens.

My first visit to Bill and Jane's home garden did not go as planned. I showed up at the door of their small brick house one Sunday afternoon for the monthly OPYGC meeting. With the elementary school closed for the summer, the club had decided to rotate meeting at different members' homes. This also gave club members a chance to visit each other's gardens, observing different styles, swapping tips, and occasionally sharing plants. On that particular Sunday, however, I mixed up the time and showed up about thirty minutes after the other club members had left. Embarrassed and disappointed, I was quickly reinvigorated when Jane invited me out back to find Bill and take a garden tour.

The couple had purchased their home in Orchard Park two years previously, moving in from the exurbs. Both grew up vegetable gardening, but had focused exclusively on flowers throughout their adult lives. Upon moving to Orchard Park the couple worked hard to re-establish their perennial flower beds, but also decided to take back up with vegetables. Both artists by trade, the couple approached gardening, whether with flowers or vegetables, as a creative but disciplined form of aesthetic expression, what Bill called "painting with plants." The artistry was readily apparent. Stepping into their backyard was like stepping into a fairy wonderland. A grass lawn for their boisterous young dog was ringed by large hosta, ornamental trees, and other

perennials. Hardy orchids stood in one corner near a rock garden full of succulents. Two different water features added contrasting elements. All along the back deck were potted plants of various kinds—ornamentals, vegetables, and herbs. Jane and Bill were quite proud, and I worried that my lack of questions that afternoon was perceived as disinterest. In fact, I was rendered nearly speechless by such a beautifully composed and well-maintained garden.

The couple's vegetable garden was no less remarkable. By sacrificing a large portion of the back yard to grass for the dog, Bill and Jane were forced to break with suburban US landscaping conventions, which stipulate that forms of materially productive land use like vegetable gardens should take place in backyards where they are not visible from the street, and plant their vegetable garden in the front yard. They hardly see it as an eyesore though—"I think it looks good," Bill said in an interview later that fall. "And with a mixture of both the flowers and vegetables up front, it's really attractive." His assessment was not wrong. The two sixteen square foot garden beds were near bursting with vegetable plants, but clearly well maintained and did not spill out into the front lawn, a small patch of grass that Bill hoped to turn completely into vegetable and herb gardens in the coming years. At the time of my first visit the sidewalk was lined with grape hyacinth and other bulb flowers, but when I visited later in the summer and fall these had been replaced with a mixture of bush beans and begonias that was quite stunning. Sherri, another OPYGC member, prefers a more traditional, what she calls "manicured," look and dislikes the idea of putting vegetable boxes in the front yard. Nevertheless, she noted on more than one occasion how attractive Bill and Jane's vegetable gardens and landscaping were, even if not her style.

There were many ways residents in Orchard Park went about making their homes look attractive according to the neighborhood's aesthetic conventions, including fresh coats of paint, manicured grass lawns, and the kinds of ornamental landscaping done by Bill and Jane, Sherri, and the other OPYGC members. For Jane and Bill though, there was also a desire to grow their own vegetables, and to care for their dog's need of an outdoor play space, and these desires

required them to negotiate new kinds of land use, namely front-yard gardening. In this endeavor, they recognized the role of vegetable plants as both providers of sustenance and visual objects acting on their neighbors, like Sherri. Working together with their plants as kinds of agents in their own right, Bill and Jane labored to create a front-yard that was both an environment supporting human and nonhuman life and a pleasing aesthetic experience within the context of their neighborhood.

Bill and Jane's desire to grow their own vegetables comes from a wish for high-quality, affordable fresh food and from their experiences of both wage labor and the actual physical work of gardening. They are a middle-aged couple without children in the home, and though both have full-time jobs, they have invested considerable labor in their gardens. Sitting together at their dining table during our fall interview, surrounded by the couple's carefully curated mixture of antiques and their own artworks, Bill began to explain to me why: "actually, planting and maintaining your garden is, in my mind, a lot like yoga. You have to get into all these different positions to take care of your garden. So I think it's good physically. And it's good mentally because it certainly is a rewarding hobby. It returns a lot both in beauty and food." Jane then added,

There's just that sense of creating something beautiful that's satisfying. But I think putting your hands in the dirt and doing the whole process of seeing the baby seeds come up, seeing the plant grow, that's a connection with the basics of life if you really start thinking about it. . . And you can see what you've done at the end of the day. It looks beautiful! If you're weeding and all those weeds are gone, it's beautiful. If you picked the food and it's just sitting on the counter, it's usually quite pretty to look at too.

For Bill though, neither the beauty of garden produce nor creative labor end with the harvest. After our interview wrapped up and Bill led me through the couple's kitchen and down the stairs to their cellar. There I was presented with shelf upon shelf of glistening mason jars, all storing a

rainbow of jams, chutneys, bean salad, and other preserved produce. The couple's garden had been extraordinarily productive that year, and Bill had begun to explore ways of preserving the couple's harvest. In the process, he found creating unique chutneys and other canned goods was yet another way for him to use gardening as a form of creative, yet practical, expression.

Such practices were particularly important to Bill. He was a working artist for many years, but the Great Recession had left him unable to make a living through his artwork. He was currently employed in a non-creative job at the same national chain where his wife worked in marketing and outreach. Thus, gardening and all the opportunities to "paint with plants" and devise new foodstuffs it offered were of great significance to Bill because "it is another creative outlet for me. My creativity has been stifled by the economy and I've really had to change what I do." In addition to finding new media for his artwork, Bill had also found new livelihood possibilities. He had so enjoyed creating unique condiments and preserved salads, and had such success growing an abundance of vegetables, that he was considering producing canned goods for sale at local farmers' markets. As acts of material production, gardening and food preserving were important ways Bill (and Jane) experienced reconnection to their labor and creativity. In their day jobs they used their creative and affective labor to produce intangible, experiential goods (advertisements and retail encounters) for a national corporation, work that did not leave them with a great sense of fulfillment. By creating unique landscaping arrangements of edible plants and food preserves the couple were able to reconnect to their labor, as well as a sense of themselves as creative, self-sufficient people who genuinely cared for the well-being of others.

Creative Projects and Classed Land Use Aesthetics 2: Reconnecting to Urban Space and Nature

In her description of gardening as creative practice, Jane references seeing seeds become plants, referring to this process as connecting with the "basics of life." Many of the gardeners with whom I spoke referred me to this same image, of a seed becoming a plant becoming food, and its deep

meaningfulness as a way to participate in what another gardener referred to as “the work of life.” Implicit (or at times explicit) in these stories is a sense that humans do not labor alone at making life. Gardeners’ descriptions always call attention to the autonomous growth of plants, the sights, smells, and tastes of ripening produce and blooming herbs, or like Jane—and many other gardeners—the feel of soil. To return to Maria’s insight from Chapter 3, gardening is always a collaboration with nature, as people, plants, birds, insects, and other nonhuman beings share together the basic work of life. Gardeners, like Jane and Bill, derive meaning from what they are able to create through the sensual physical labor they share with nonhumans. For other gardeners, like Lara, there is also meaning to be found in the very act of multispecies collaboration.

I first encountered Lara at a meeting for the local permaculture interest group, PE!. This group met one evening a month at a local assisted care living facility. The location is admittedly an odd one, but the parlor was free, as was the coffee, and the use of this meeting facility tangibly underscored the permaculturalist philosophy that all components of social and ecological systems are interconnected and valuable; there is never any waste, in people or in plants. Coincidentally, one of the topics for discussion that summer evening in 2014 was on the application of permaculture principles to society, with Lara seeking input on a permaculture inspired intersection repair project for her neighborhood.⁵⁶

Strapped for cash due to decades of economic recession, neither the State of Michigan nor the City of Elmwood had been able to invest adequate funds in road repair. Neglected for years, one of the main thoroughfares in the city had become nearly impassable. Driving down it I always slowed to twenty miles per hour and even then the potholes still threatened to swallow my small sedan whole. To avoid this nasty stretch of road many motorists had taken to cutting through the adjacent neighborhood, the primarily white, decidedly middle class, Park Heights. These cars traveled rapidly down residential streets and provoked a concerted campaign from the

⁵⁶ Intersection repair, begun in Portland, OR, is a method of decorating the pavement of the intersection with painted murals and other artworks so as to draw attention to the space as an aesthetic object, in order to redirect emphasis to the site as one of habitation, rather than merely transit.

neighborhood association for the installation of speed bumps. Lara lived in this neighborhood and was disconcerted by the ways the change in traffic flow had disrupted daily life, making her street feel unsafe and her community threatened. She hoped an intersection repair project would increase safety along this street and bring the community together in a positive way.

When I interviewed Lara a couple of months later in a local coffee shop favored by the city's artistic milieu, she explained that her plans were on hold. A recent block party she helped host had drawn some complaints from neighbors for shutting down a street block and creating too much noise. As a result of this response, she felt it best to go slow with her other plans for altering street life in the neighborhood. Lara is soft-spoken and gentle in her mannerisms, but emotive; it was clear she was disappointed by this outcome. But she is also persistent and patient, and retained her hopes for redoing an intersection, as well as establishing more Little Free Libraries⁵⁷ and other kinds impromptu public spaces. Such projects were part of what she described as "making more humane urban space." These efforts in turn stemmed from her desire to see Elmwood

get all our energy locally and sustainably. Most of the food would be local too . . . People would value human life, and everyone would be safe, whether from traffic or because they're different. There would be vibrant schools and shorter work weeks . . . The river would be clean and there would be lots of recreational activities. And there would be a thriving arts and performance community.

Lara actively worked toward this goal in her efforts to reclaim public space and her support for public art and community theater. She was also an avid gardener, and this holistic, locally-minded worldview was reflected in her gardening practices. At her home, which she owned with her husband and shared with their two children, Lara had a chicken coop, six sixteen square foot

⁵⁷ Little Free Library is a nationwide movement to put small kiosks housing books that are freely available to the public in front of homes and in public spaces. These libraries operate on the principle that users can return the book if they choose, donate unwanted books of their own, or neither. LFLs were gaining popularity in Elmwood in 2013–2014, and I documented over half a dozen in the city at this time. See www.littlefreelibrary.org.

raised beds, a greenhouse constructed out of salvaged windows, and was currently converting the front yard into a permaculture-based fruit tree and native plant garden. Lara's worldview and gardening practices evinced a kind of collaborative understanding of the production of urban environments. She conceived of the city, at least in its idealized form, as a place where humans and nature co-existed to the benefit of each other, and recognized that creating such urban forms required working with other human and nonhuman beings toward their mutual well-being.

Growing up in New York City, Lara, the daughter of Latino immigrants, did not garden. She only began growing her own food in graduate school in Portland, Oregon, but had been doing it ever since. When I asked her why she kept gardening, what she got out of it, she responded:

I could go on forever about how much I get out of gardening. It's about my health and my place in nature. It feels right to be out in the sun, with my hands in the dirt. I feel healthier. I could weed forever. It makes me calmer and more present. When I garden, I feel happier and wiser. And it's nice to be in a beautiful space that is peaceful despite all its chaos.

The work is not without its challenges though. In asking gardeners about the benefits of their hobby, I always paired the question with one about challenges, which typically elicited far less poetic answers that focused mainly on a lack of time or the vagaries of garden pests. Lara's response was one of the more elaborate and introspective:

I feel bad when something dies. But gardening is something you have to learn by doing. . . Getting used to manipulating plants takes practice and confidence and willingness to fail. I'm a practicing Buddhist, and I see gardening as a challenge to stay in the present. . . You have to go with the flow and try new things.

New things such as getting comfortable with bugs—"I'm still getting used to the bugs, but I've noticed a transition from the bad bugs to good bugs like grasshoppers and crickets. And it seems noisy now with all the natural sounds from birds and bugs." In Lara's telling, gardening is a relational process, one she undertakes both within and in partnership with nature, represented in

garden plants, weeds, soil, and bugs.

Thus, through her permaculture-style gardening methods, Lara found herself actively involved in the production of her environment, creating a particular kind of multispecies habitat and altering her own experience of urban living in the process. By enrolling nonhuman beings like grasshoppers and crickets in her gardening projects Lara recognized the ability of these insects to participate in the making of thriving fruit and vegetable gardens, and subsequently the well-being of herself, her household, and her community. In her work on political economy and urban space Sharon Zukin (1991, 2008, 2009) elaborates an understanding of deindustrialization as a reconfiguration of urban landscapes from an orientation toward production to the facilitation of consumption, and of gentrification as a particular kind of intensification of this process. I interpret Lara's creative, collaborative gardening labor and related public space projects as a reaction to such landscapes of consumption, one that also draws attention to the ecosystems she believes urban residents are also alienated from. Rather than witness her neighborhood and city become places of disconnection and anomie as people moved among various sites of consumption and alienated labor—exemplified in the commuters whizzing down her street—Lara took steps to reconnect to both the social life of her neighborhood and the ecological relations that nurtured her.

While all gardening projects encompass a degree of this type of collaboration with nature, not all collaborations are as equitable and compassionate as the partnership between Lara and her garden. In fact, Lara was perhaps more attuned to the entanglement of species within complex urban ecologies than most of the gardeners with whom I spoke. For many flower and vegetable gardeners nature was a subordinate partner, one whose agency should be strictly disciplined (cf. Foucault 1979). This attitude was apparent in the ways gardeners talked about gardens and aesthetics. By letting nature be an active collaborator in her gardening projects Lara ceded a degree of control over the appearance of her garden. Plants grew tall and bushy; they spilled the bounds of their beds; not all of them were pretty, particularly once their blooms have passed

(Figure 5.1). Their purpose was primarily to participate in ecosystems nurturing insects and people, not to be aesthetically pleasing, though many who gardened in this way reported finding this “wild” look to be very enjoyable. Such gardeners were a minority though; most adhered to degrees to what Sherri called a “manicured” style. “I want things nice and neat,” she said. “It should look taken care of.” When plants grew in tangles, “weeds” were allowed to flourish, vegetables were grown in front yards or intermingled with herbs and flowers, when yards looked not unlike meadows, they were perceived as being uncared for, allowed to grow wild, nature untamed and undisciplined.



Figure 5.1 *An example of the type of pollinator friendly plants found in Lara’s garden, after they have bloomed.*

This variation in opinion suggests that the production of the environment cannot be disarticulated from the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs. As I will argue more extensively in Chapter 6, aesthetic norms and land use preferences are cultural forms that emerge out social processes of class formation (Low 2004; Winegar 2016). Orchard Park is an

historically working-class neighborhood, and as such has struggled through deindustrialization and the housing market collapse with rising rates of home vacancy and accompanying declines in home and yard maintenance. Adhering to middle-class suburban land use practices, exemplified in minimal, “neat” landscaping and an absence of visible livelihood activities like gardening (Hayden 2004; Heiman 2015; Robbins 2007), was one way residents shored up their and their neighborhood’s increasingly precarious class status, a project that was evident in the very purpose of the OPYGC, to improve the neighborhood by inspiring and assisting in better yard and garden maintenance. Within this particular class-based context, Bill and Jane’s focus on garden aesthetics takes on new meaning, as I interpret their collaboration with various vegetable and ornamental plants as more than an effort to please themselves and their neighbors. I posit that it was also an effort to come to terms with life in a working-class neighborhood. By conforming their front-yard garden to standard suburban landscaping norms as much as possible, Jane and Bill hoped to avoid the interpretation of their yard as messy and unkempt, because these visual cues were used by their neighbors and Elmwoodites more broadly to index a downwardly mobile, working-class status to both individual landowners and their surrounding neighborhood.

Conversely, Lara’s forms of environmental production were made possible by her location in a solidly middle-class neighborhood. Though her land use practices violated most urban and suburban norms—there was a proliferation of insect life, her plants grew far taller than the two feet allowed by zoning ordinance, and she kept livestock—this eccentricity was tolerated by the majority of her neighbors. While some publically voiced concerns that “wild” gardens like Lara’s would erode property values in Park Heights and in middle-class neighborhoods throughout Elmwood, there were also those who championed these gardens as emblems of the city’s progressive, environmentalist values and commitment to creative, “green” urban development. As a result, these visual markers did not have as clear a classed meaning as in working-class neighborhoods like Orchard Park. Gardeners like Lara were less likely to have genuinely derelict homes next door, already depressing neighborhood property values, and were

more likely to have neighbors that were actively supporting the city's green urban development agenda. Thus, while for Lara, Bill, and Jane gardening was a way to reconnect in the face of alienation, the precise form their gardening activities took, and the ends toward which these gardeners directed their creative material labor, varied in class-specific ways. All three considered ecological sustainability and urban land use aesthetics to be important, but faced different kinds of constraints in using gardens to care for these priorities while reconnecting to land and labor. In the following section I turn to a further consideration of the role of social inequality in shaping processes of reconnection via gardening, by attending to the ways these processes were linked by some gardeners to explicit political projects.

Creating Food Sovereignty 1: Reconnecting to Food Systems

The monthly meetings at the Williams-Bell Community Center were always lively affairs. The Center itself is fairly quiet at nine on a weekday morning; only the odd fitness class for senior citizens draws residents in to a site focused primarily on after-school youth programming. But as representatives from the various community and government organizations serving Elmwood's Williams-Bell neighborhood trickled in, snagging coffee and donuts, a certain buzz builds in the air. Colleagues are grateful for the chance to see one another, and Marcus, the Center's director, grandly welcomes everyone with his booming voice and warm manner. I began attending these meetings at the behest of Marcus, who invited me to come after we met in May 2014 to discuss the history of the Williams-Bell Community Center and youth garden. At my first meeting in June about a dozen people were in attendance, circled up around a large rectangular table in the Center's main room. These meetings, organized by Marcus, were a chance for the various organizations working in Williams-Bell, Elmwood's most impoverished and underserved, and historically African-American, neighborhood, to let each other know what they were doing, exchange ideas, and coordinate efforts when possible. To that end meetings consisted of going around the table, with each individual introducing themselves, giving an update on the past

month's programming, and announcing any upcoming changes, events, or requests. Most of those in attendance at my first meeting (and all subsequent meetings as well) were white women, so Jennifer, a young African-American woman, stood out. Jennifer was the director of a local youth-focused non-profit and an outspoken voice at the table, raising critical points about racial and gender issues, such as when she criticized the City's community meeting on public safety for cutting Q&A short when questions about racial bias in policing were raised, or her concern with making sure young women were being recruited and included in community programming. When it was my turn I explained my project, and asked anyone at the table who knew gardeners that might be interested in participating to see me after the meeting. After about an hour the meeting wound down and people collected their things to go. The folks from the Elmwood Housing Authority had some suggestions for me and cards were exchanged. As I prepared to leave, Jennifer enthusiastically approached me to let me know that she was a gardener and would be interested in participating in my project. Delighted, I handed her a survey which she returned to me at the next month's meeting.

I saw Jennifer on and off over the summer at Williams-Bell Community Meetings, and by that fall we had finally scheduled an interview, meeting at a downtown coffee shop one weekday afternoon. Settling in to a table by the window we made small talk while I got all the papers, recorder, and forms arranged. It turned out Jennifer was new to gardening, having just completed her first growing season. I asked her what inspired her to start growing her own food and after professing a lifelong interest in gardening—her grandmother gardened and she was around it growing up—she quickly reaches the 'root' of the matter. A juice cleanse⁵⁸ kicked off what she termed, "a knowledge quest for food":

I read a lot of books and I learned a lot about where food comes from . . . I also realized this country started off with people growing their own food and all of the

⁵⁸ A dietary scheme where the participant consumes nothing but an assortment of fruit and vegetable juices over a fixed period of time.

sudden— not all of sudden, but over the years we've moved towards buying our food. . . And my grandmother always talks about it, and used to have a garden. So I just started connecting all these different dots about how I grew up and how older generations would talk about when we were out in the garden. Yeah, *when we were out in the garden*. And then picturing where the food [nowadays] was coming from, and there's random salmonella on a tomato. . . It made me a lot more conscious of where it's coming from, or where it's not coming from and the resources that go into getting it here and how it kind of negatively impacts us, with like gas emissions trying to take food from California to here. And also just the quality of food and cost. It costs way less, if you grow it.

I quote Jennifer at length here because the connections she made in this statement exemplify narratives I heard from a range of young gardeners who, like her, were dissatisfied with the social and ecological status quo of the current US food system. In interviews and casual conversations with young people (18–30) about gardening, I was struck, as I was in my interview with Jennifer, by the passionate and deeply personal connections that led young Elmwoodites, both black and white, working and middle class, to take up vegetable gardening. Like Jennifer, they responded to their experiences with food, various critical messages about industrial agriculture, and their own family histories, by deciding to take the production of at least a portion of their food, quite literally, into their own hands.

To help her in this undertaking Jennifer enlisted a friend. Together the two women created a garden plot in a hoophouse on the friend's mother's property just outside of town. Neither had any hands-on experience gardening or growing in a hoophouse, so that year had been an experiment. As Jennifer put it, “we had a lot of weird stuff happening.” The lettuce was bitter, the radishes white, and the eggplant no bigger than cherry tomatoes, but the arugula, beans, cucumbers, and cherry tomatoes thrived. “It was a lot of trial and error,” Jennifer admitted, but looked forward to the coming year. “We're going to be a lot more strategic about what we plant,

when we plant it, and actually knowing about what we plant.” Many gardeners learn by doing, but Jennifer connects her experience with the “trial and error” method to issues of intergenerationality and her family’s history of gardening.

Kids don’t, and even my generation, don’t necessarily know how to do anything. My parents’ generation is probably the last generation that could have had that person to person hand down, pass down of knowledge as regards how to even sew or garden, cut wood. Like those things are things our grandparents knew and had to know how to do. But our parents skipped that and went straight to oh, we don’t have to do that anymore so we’re not going to teach you. And I realized that I’d like to know how to care for myself if something would—and I’m sure nothing will—but if something were to happen I’d like to know I could take care of myself. If all the food would be gone out of the grocery stores tomorrow. . .

Jennifer trailed off, laughing. She was a fan of zombie apocalypse movies and television shows, and while she was quite earnest about her desire to be prepared in the event food supplies were disrupted, she also could not help but connect that desire in a humorous way to the entertainment she enjoyed.⁵⁹

Concerns about cataclysm, real or fantastical, aside, Jennifer’s narrative about the loss of practical skills is echoed in many of the stories young people told me about learning to garden, and in elder (<65) Elmwoodites’ explanations of why the practice of vegetable gardening had declined in prevalence. These stories were also intimately tied to histories of migration, by white and black Americans alike, from the rural South. Jennifer’s grandparents migrated to Michigan

⁵⁹ Nor was Jennifer alone in doing so. One team at the community garden training I attended included members who were part of a “zombie outbreak response team”—a nationwide group that uses zombies to put a fanciful spin on serious “prepping,” that is being prepared for various apocalyptic scenarios, from pandemics to nuclear war (see <http://uszort.com>). To be clear, Jennifer was not a zombie prepper, but in her references to zombie apocalypse, I find resonances with the concern for apocalyptic scenarios, particularly those resulting from climate change, that motivated other gardeners to varying extents (see Chapter 6). While these sentiments contribute to my framing of socioecological precarity, I did not investigate with any depth or specificity the connections between urban gardening and apocalyptic temporalities; I suggest further research is warranted.

from the rural American South and their suburban home nurtured a vegetable garden full of collards and tomatoes. “They were far removed from their southern [way of life],” Jennifer says, “but still had a garden that actually grew food in their backyard.” Raised in industrial Michigan as part of a new African-American working-middle class, Jennifer’s parents gave up gardening in favor of more “traditional” suburban lifestyles and land uses.

What motivated this shift away from gardening, for Jennifer’s parents and the many other middle-aged African-Americans like them? Such decisions cannot be understood outside the histories that shaped them. Through slavery and then sharecropping, African-Americans in the United States have a long history of being brutally tied to agricultural land and practices. Factory work in places like Michigan offered a way to leave behind these violent ways of life (Gregory 2005; Sugrue 1996; Williams-Forsen 2006). The struggles of life in a new city—finding housing, facing race- and class-based discrimination, adjusting to different ways of life—meant newcomers took time adjusting, and many of these new arrivals continued to grow vegetables and keep chickens in order to make ends meet and retain a sense of cultural continuity. As elder gardeners with whom I spoke reported, for the most part these activities died out with Jennifer’s parents’ generation, those that came to urban Michigan as children or were born there. Many acquired suburban homes in neighborhoods like Tremont and Orchard Park and gave up these activities voluntarily; legislation passed by the city outlawing urban livestock raising also discouraged many others.

Yet a desire to leave behind agricultural ways of life is not the only explanation for the decline in vegetable gardening among Elmwood’s working class communities and communities of color. Anecdotally, several people in the “missing” 30–60 year-old age range expressed an interest in gardening, such as two black women I chatted with at the bus stop by the Tremont Community Garden. They joked that now they were grandmothers they ought to take up gardening, and stated more seriously that they were genuinely interested in doing so, but as one woman reminded the other, they had to work and therefore had little time. Thus, I suggest that if

structural inequalities forced African-American and poor Southern white migrants into growing food for themselves and others—labor they migrated to Michigan to escape yet continued to do on a household level for a variety of economic and cultural reasons—these same inequalities continue to shape life such that working-class Elmwoodites and Elmwoodites of color now often struggle to find the time and resources necessary to garden.

Awareness of this inequity has motivated a particular kind of framing of urban gardening and agriculture among African-American communities in Detroit and throughout southeastern Michigan (though not in Elmwood, beyond a few individuals like Jennifer) as a form of self-determination, wherein these communities can reclaim their relationships to food production and also address issues such as an overabundance of fast-food restaurants and a dearth of grocery stores selling fresh produce in their neighborhoods that are the direct result of systemic discrimination toward and disinvestment in black communities (Eisenhauer 2001; Gallagher 2007; White 2010; Zenk et al. 2011). Jennifer was actively involved in racial justice initiatives in the Elmwood area and committed personally and professionally to undoing the structural inequalities that still constrain the lives of black Americans. While she mentioned in passing her family's, and other African-Americans', painful relationship with agriculture and food production in the United States, like the black community farmers in Detroit (see White 2010, 2011) Jennifer believed that growing your own food could be a source of empowerment.

When you see that food and you grow it, you're proud of it. Do you see what I grew? And you want people to share it with you and you want people to experience it with you and eat it . . . And there's also something about acquiring a knowledge set, a skill, that kind of empowers you internally to be like oh, if I can grow a garden, I wonder what else I can do. It's almost like a stepping stone to something else. It's like a self-empowerment, an intrinsic motivation that you don't even necessarily know until you see the first tomato grow. And it's like oh, I did that. Even though you didn't do anything because it was gonna grow. But

the feeling is still there.

For Jennifer, like the African-American urban farmers in Detroit documented by White, recovering the skills to grow one's own food, on one's own terms, was a powerful way of realizing agency and reclaiming control over food, land, and health, of reconnecting to food systems otherwise predicated on the exploitation and disinvestment in their bodies, labor, and ecosystems.

Jennifer's efforts to procure food in ways that are environmentally sustainable, nurture her health, and recover the skills and lifeways of previous generations all the while claiming "[her] right to define [her] own food and agriculture systems" (Via Campesina 1996, in Holt-Gimenez 2009) can be considered a form of what activists and scholars term "food sovereignty." Originally developed by smallhold farmers in Latin America in the 1990s as a framework for contesting the trade liberalization and fights over intellectual property rights resulting from the inclusion of agriculture in the World Trade Organization (Edelman 2005; Holt-Gimenez 2009), the framework of food sovereignty has increasingly been applied outside of agricultural production based contexts to the struggles of poor and working class communities and communities of color to secure access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food through food systems that they have helped define, structure, and govern (Alkon and Julian Agyeman 2011; McMichael 2009). Jennifer's motivations for gardening and experiences of reconnection to food systems, in the context of her critical awareness of the political economy of industrial food production and her family history, illustrate the claims of food sovereignty while highlighting the ways these claims engage the materiality and creativity of food and food production, and even—in Jennifer's acknowledgment that the vegetable plants really grow themselves—multispecies relationships.

Creating Food Sovereignty 2: Reconnecting to Labor, Space, and Food

The relationship between gardening as creative material practice and food sovereignty also emerges in the story of Ruth and the Center for Independent Living (CIL) Community Garden. I

met Ruth while trying to solicit volunteers for the Towerview Community Garden's project to build more wheelchair accessible beds from a local non-profit where she worked. As a young woman with cerebral palsy, who had previously worked as the recreation coordinator at the CIL⁶⁰ and helped organize their community garden, Ruth had a lot of insight and experience to offer the Towerview gardeners and me. We began chatting more during our interactions, and eventually sat down for an interview at a local cafe. I had never previously considered the relationships between disability,⁶¹ community gardening, and food access, and Ruth proved a knowledgeable instructor. Over the course of many more conversations, sipping juice at cafes or curled up on her couch with her tiny dog Carita, a warm friendship developed. By sharing her own experiences with me, I came to understand the importance of community gardens as a form of social and environmental justice for the disabled community.

“I had this knowledge early on that it wasn't necessarily my CP [cerebral palsy] that was horrible. It was how people reacted to it. What I hated wasn't that I walked this way. What I hated was the way people reacted to it.” What would it mean to live in a world where disability was not considered *a priori* to be a horrible thing, that was based on the premise that disabled people were full members of society, with all the rights and responsibilities that entails? These are questions that the social model of disability tried to answer. This model, as Ruth so evocatively articulates it, holds that there is nothing intrinsically wrong or limiting about being disabled. Rather it is society, and the failure to be accessible and inclusive of all people, that creates the condition of disability (Altman 2001; Clare 2001). A central component of the social model of disability is the concept of universal design, a concept that Ruth has defined as “a worldwide movement that approaches the design of the environment, products, and communications with the widest range of users in

⁶⁰ Centers for Independent Living are sites, managed by persons with disabilities, that provide a set of core services, along with a range of other peer-to-peer mentoring and activities, that are all focused on helping those with disabilities live independently of medicalized or charitable service models. Services include such things as classes on finance and cooking, and recreational facilities like adaptive bicycle rental and community gardens.

⁶¹ Here and throughout, as is the convention in disability literature, I refer to both physical and mental disabilities, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

mind, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.” Proponents argue that through universal design, things like buildings can be created from the outset to accommodate the needs of widely diverse users, including for example those with limited or assisted mobility, and thereby eliminate one way in which disability is marked and created, through differential access to the built environment.

While the social model of disability and the principles of universal design underlie much of the current disability rights movement (e.g. the Americans with Disabilities Act), the idea that disabled people are less than and must be treated with pity continues to inform much of the conventional societal responses to disability. Rather than create the conditions under which disabled people can make their own autonomous choices and procure their own self-care, the necessities of life, like food, are provided as a form of charitable service. For example, food is both financially and physically difficult or impossible for many disabled people to access independently. These individuals must rely on other, able-bodied, people, rigid employment schemes, or inadequate government welfare programs to pay their bills, do their shopping, prepare their meals, and even feed them.⁶² Such arrangements are profoundly disempowering, and also serve to alienate disabled people from their food systems, labor, and even self-care. What Ruth and other proponents of the social model of disability argue is that the built environment and socioeconomic relations should be reworked so as to be accessible to all people, regardless of dis/ability. In accordance with the principles of universal design, grocery stores, kitchens, restaurants, assisted living facilities, and welfare programs should all be made accessible to disabled people and enable them to make their own decisions about how their food should be prepared, procured, and consumed.

⁶² Social service programs for people with disabilities are tied to participation in the workforce. Those who are able are encouraged to find employment, often through existing programs which shunt disabled people into particular kinds of jobs—“food, flowers, filing, and filth.” However, receipt of cash and other benefits such as medical care is tied to limited participation in the workforce; if a disabled person makes over a set amount of money, they lose their benefits and often face entirely unaffordable health care costs. Thus, disabled people are constructed as a kind of reserve labor pool while simultaneously being kept in a state of social exception through dependence on subsidized health care and other social services.



Figures 5.2 and 5.3 *The CIL Community Garden. Photo credit: “Ruth.”*

To help me better understand the social model of disability and the principles of universal design and access, particularly as they apply to community gardening, following our initial interview Ruth invited me to visit the CIL Community Garden. Meeting her at the CIL a week later, she toured me around a garden with wide, paved walkways (Figures 5.2 and 5.3). Beds were elevated at different heights off the ground and there were water spigots attached to each one. The shed opened with sliding doors, and had a large vestibule to provide a shaded resting space. A variety of tools, with different handles and angles, were available. These were all surprisingly simple features, yet I had never seen them in a community garden before. Here were the things that Ruth and other disabled people needed to garden independently—smooth, level pathways wide enough to maneuver a wheelchair; beds at heights for those who sit or stand; a range of tools and little conveniences. Most importantly, the garden was open to anyone who wanted a little space to grow some plants; members of the general public, abled and disabled alike, were welcome. Why, I asked Ruth, were there not more gardens that met these relatively straightforward needs?

I've heard from a lot of organizations that they've never really considered universal design or accessibility as applied to community gardens before. You know, statistically people with disabilities are isolated and there's a lot of social reasons why they're sort of not involved in community recreation activities. . . So I think it's normal for them, for us to be overlooked when it comes to something like community gardening. Also people view gardening as a more physical act. It's hard for some people to believe it can be adapted. . . We were trying to make a compost system and one guy was like, it's a lot of work, and I was like, we can do physical work if it's accessible.

Like food, community recreational spaces are all too often inaccessible to disabled people. With the attitude that disability represents a deficit, all too many people are conditioned to give services to those with disabilities, rather than create the conditions for them to procure or participate in existing forms of social life.

For Ruth, community gardens were a way for disabled people to address both the problems of accessible food and recreation simultaneously. By growing their own food, disabled people could claim for themselves the right to determine not only what food they ate, but the social and ecological conditions of its production. Like Jennifer's quest for sustainable food and life skills, gardening among disabled people can become an act of reconnection and of food sovereignty. By designing gardens to be physically accessible to people regardless of their mental or bodily capacities and designating them as social spaces open to the participation of all, community gardens like the one at the CIL attempted to become inclusive recreational facilities. According to Ruth, these experiences of growing one's own food in an accessible and inclusive space can be transformative.

I loved growing the food and getting my hands dirty in the soil. There were a lot of gardeners who never [before] had their own individual plots, never grew their own food. . . And there was another lady who said that people always did things

for her or corrected her and there was never anything that was hers and the individual plots was hers. And if something died or something lived, it was hers. She had sole responsibility.

Summing up her experience, Ruth adds, “the ways the gardeners were thinking about food and their own self-esteem were changing and community members who never thought about accessibility as a food justice issue were changing.” Inspired by her work at the CIL garden, Ruth has gone on to become a leading local activist and knowledge source on gardening, disability, and universal design—a fact Ruth finds both amusing and indicative of the social exclusion facing disabled people, given her very limited personal gardening experience.

“Gardening is a grand experiment,” Ruth says. She uses this sentence to refer to her own lack of experience gardening and her willingness to try new things and occasionally fail. However, for Ruth gardening is also a grand experiment in radical inclusion, universal access, and reconnection.

It [the garden] can be like a microcosm where either societal prejudices and hierarchies play out or where they get resolved. There’s not a lot of places that are truly inclusive in society in general. There’s lots of segregation between abled and disabled bodied people in general, just in the built environment. I think if we could build an inclusive garden attitudes would start to change.

Ruth continues in this optimistic vein: “If we can be successful in a small environment maybe we can create a ripple effect.”

Ruth’s inspiring vision had yet to come to fruition. Though the CIL garden did flourish under her leadership, they never did succeed in recruiting regular able-bodied participants. The following year (2013) Ruth switched jobs. The garden continued through Ruth and other’s volunteer efforts, and was eventually added as a garden site run by a local non-profit. However, participation had been low and Ruth worried about the garden’s future. She and the CIL had created a garden space based on universal design, a built environment that made vegetable

gardens, and the experience of vegetable gardening, physically accessible to all people. Social barriers had proven harder to dismantle. Ruth cited a lack of funding for disability services, abled-bodied people's avoidance of disabled people, and disabled people's own internalized oppression as factors stymying success. Yet the possibilities for experimenting with accessible and just societies in microcosm by creating new configurations of physical experience and material space in the form of universal design gardens remained.

These possibilities, like the potential pathway leading from gardening to further empowerment and social activism cited by Jennifer, inhere in part in the same gritty, tangible, physical stuff of gardening that propels folks like Bill, Jane, and Lara into a recognition of their role in the production of urban environments. Indeed, it is the recognition of themselves as producers that motivates gardeners like Jennifer and Ruth to connect gardening to their own experiences and concerns about social inequalities, leading them to ask, as Jennifer puts it, "if I can grow a garden, I wonder what else I can do." Moreover, these connections have led Jennifer and Ruth to claim rights to determine where they get their food from and how it is produced. In so doing their experiences of gardening broaden our understandings of food sovereignty, suggesting this concept account for the power of creative material labor and the right to perform that labor, as much as the rights to crop selection, ownership, and the adequate provision of food that have garnered the majority of attention in food sovereignty scholarship thus far. In other words, these women were claiming a type of food sovereignty that included the right to participate in the production of the material bases of their lives.⁶³

⁶³ Arguably, for farmers in the Global South where the concept of food sovereignty originated, the relationship to physical labor is quite different—a requirement of their livelihoods. In positing a further dimension to food sovereignty, one that accounts for the power of participating in material labor, I do not wish to romanticize the work of those who rely on this labor for their and their household's continued existence. Rather, I mean to suggest that in different political-economic and geographic contexts, such as the urban Global North, food sovereignty takes on different dimensions.

Touching the Soil, Exploring Reconnection, Producing Environments

In making their claims to food sovereignty, Ruth and Jennifer touch on a broader claim, one about the significance of creative material labor like gardening. For what is it about feeling the soil that is so compelling? Why is growing one's own food so satisfying, even empowering? Within capitalist economies, argues Marx (1976), workers exist in a state of alienation; they are divorced from the control of their labor, the products of their labor, and their means of subsistence, and as a result, they are also prevented from creating the kind of social relations they desire with each other. When Jane talks about getting in touch with "the basics of life" or Ruth observes the transformative impact being responsible for the life and death of a vegetable plant has on a disabled gardener, what these individuals are commenting on is an experience devoid of alienation. It is the gardeners' hands that touch the soil, that plant the seed, that water the earth and pull the weeds, that tie up tendrils and pick off pests, that harvest ripe fruits and cook nourishing meals. Throughout the process, the gardeners' labor, as well as the conditions and products of their labor, belong to them.

Furthermore, these acts of material production require gardeners to collaborate with a range of nonhuman beings in order to produce their vegetables, and to engage with the ways urban life embeds them in relationships with other people. Different experiences of wage labor, urban life and ecology, and family and personal histories generated specific engagements with gardening. For gardeners like Ruth and Jennifer, for example, experiences of alienation sat alongside those of race and disability such that gardening afforded them a way to draw together reconnections to their food systems and labor and the political project of food sovereignty. Meanwhile, for Lara, Bill, and Jane, reconnection to labor and urban life through gardening necessitated considerations of land use aesthetics with respect to their and their neighbors' concerns with class precarity—or the lack thereof. In other words, experiences of race and class based inequality ran alongside and interacted with desires to reconnect to land and labor in ways that manifest in gardeners' motivations and activities. As with caring priorities, the ways

Elmwoodites went about addressing alienation through gardening represented a shared desire to make a better life for self and others. the form these efforts took could not be disentangled from differences of class and race.

However, just as the desire to care transcended these differences, for all the gardeners in this chapter, and the many others like them in Elmwood, gardening represented a sense of reconnection with the material bases of life. Bill, Jane, Lara, Jennifer, and Ruth were all trying to do, in their own personal ways, what Rose very explicitly describes in her quote at the outset of this chapter—to grasp and value something that was not consumption, to be active makers of their environments and sustenance. In other words, gardening provided Elmwoodites with one way of overcoming alienation, through a recognition that urban environments are something that is produced, and that they are active participants in that process. In this way, the recognition of gardening as a kind of production of the environment became the basis for a particular kind of environmental engagement among some gardeners, what in the following chapter I approach as a form of social reproduction. That is, not only were gardeners like Ruth and Lara coming to understand themselves as producers of their urban environments (alongside myriad other human and nonhuman beings), but they were also attempting to create the specific environments they desired for themselves and others.

Chapter 6: “To fall in love with place”: Creating Caring (and Classed) Urban Environments Out of Gardens and Beehives

During my research in 2013–2014, I found myself paying increasing attention to the labor of beekeepers, as beekeeping, both in backyards and in cooperative projects, was on the rise in Elmwood. This increase was due in part to the passage of a zoning ordinance in 2011 that legalized beekeeping in the City and the concomitant growth of organizations like the Honeybee Initiative. The number of beekeepers remained small; I estimated no more than two dozen. However, nearly all of the apiarists in Elmwood were also gardeners, and I quickly learned that these beekeepers cum gardeners viewed the two activities of a piece—honeybees facilitated the pollination of plants and plant species were selected to meet the needs of honeybees. Thus, I set out to learn more about Elmwood’s beekeepers, specifically the ways practitioners thought about beekeeping in relation to gardening and other sustainable land use practices. Some were interested in craft production and propagating survivor hives.⁶⁴ The rest were hobbyists, people committed to sustainable urban living and “helping the bees,” but with little interest in expanding their activities to include establishing new hives or generating income.

Among this latter group were several families with school-age children who spoke of an additional motivation. As Laura, a mother of two, put it, “With the hive we can raise awareness, in our family, among our neighbors, with all those that hear about it or come to visit. Especially kids. My daughters’ friends come over and see the hive. . . It helps make the sensational regular, so kids will come to think that things like keeping bees or chickens is normal.” Laura is a member of the Honeybee Initiative, and I met her through one of the organization’s founders, who had helped install Laura’s hive the year before. I interviewed Laura one cool weekday morning in October 2014, and as we sat cozily sipping tea (with backyard honey) in the kitchen of her home in Hilltop, she explained her motivation to begin keeping bees: “We [she and her husband] saw a movie about bees and Colony Collapse Disorder at the library. We were drawn in by the free

⁶⁴ Survivor hives in this context refers to both hives that have resisted Colony Collapse Disorder (see n.47, p.120) and have survived Michigan’s harsh winters.

popcorn, but we both left feeling we needed to become beekeepers.” Their spacious yard, dotted with artwork and large clumps of pollinator-friendly flowers like echinacea and goldenrod, was already home to a vegetable garden and chicken coop, so as Laura told me, the bees fit right in with their attempts at a sustainable urban lifestyle. At the time of our interview Laura was the leader of a “green” initiative at her daughters’ school, and the hive also supported her goal of teaching children to become adults who make “purposeful choices about land use,” which she clarified through the examples of edible landscapes and pollinator gardens.

Laura’s hope was that by changing the experience of urban space among those close to her she could inspire them to think about living in urban environments that allowed for the flourishing of many different species. Explicit in Laura’s efforts to create more sustainable ways of life was the acknowledgement that she lived in an environment characterized by resource-intensive, consumption-based lifestyles and disinvestment in the well-being of both humans and their ecosystems. Also explicit was her desire to live in an environment that nurtured the mutual well-being of multiple species and her belief that through activities like gardening and beekeeping, she could contribute to making such environments a reality.

This understanding of the urban environment, as something which is both produced by and productive of human action in the world resonates with the conceptions of urban space put forward by anthropologists of space and place. Advancing an understanding of urban space as both physical materiality of location and the social relations that produce and are produced by it, these scholars have investigated the ways particular arrangements come to be through the workings of state power (Davis 1990; Scott 1998), economic elites (Caldeira 2005), and ordinary people (Ghannam 2002; Monroe 2016). These processes by which social and spatial relations are co-constituted are particularly salient in studies of sociospatial inequality, as ethnographers such as Low (2004) have considered the ways racism and concerns for class precarity have given rise to spatial formations like gated neighborhoods among white, middle-class Americans that produce the very fears over declining social status they were designed to mitigate (see also

Caldeira 2005). In the case of Laura, her gardening and beekeeping projects occurred within urban spaces produced through Elmwood's specific political-economic history, particularly the ways differences of race and class have determined access to social and material resources and been instantiated in space through the formation of neighborhoods via discrimination and differential land use practices. Laura's yard, with its bees and chickens and vegetables, emerges in relation to mid-twentieth century suburban aesthetics and land use practices that prioritize neatness and material unproductivity, as well as her family's relative class and racial privilege and their desires to pursue sustainable urban lifestyles. These sociopolitical relations and aesthetic priorities manifest in the variable ways spaces like Laura's yard are used, governed, and given meaning (Foucault 1979, 1984; Lefebvre 1991; Low 2004)—over a century of race- and class-based discrimination in employment, housing, and land use policy have rendered Laura's neighborhood such that residents are all more or less like her: white, middle-class, well-educated homeowners willing to tolerate a degree of eccentric land use from one of their own (Heiman 2015). As will be discussed further in Chapter 7, Laura and her neighbors are also fluent in the language of ecological sustainability and "green" cities, which both made activities like Laura's beekeeping legible to her neighbors and provided a way of articulating the ethical imperatives that underlie such activities.

Yet in this analysis there is something missing. For it is not just Laura, and Elmwoodites past and present, that are engaged in the production of urban space. Nor are the spaces so produced only for the use and habitation of human life. In other words, what is absent in most of the anthropological literature on urban space is an attention to the role of nonhuman life, of nature and ecosystems, in producing it. Therefore, I argue, if I am to follow the insights provided by multispecies ethnographers and my research participants and take seriously the role of nonhuman beings, then the framework for analysis must be expanded to address what I term the urban

environment.⁶⁵ Thus in this chapter, I examine the use of gardening and beekeeping to create more equitable and sustainable forms of urban life through the framework of the production of the environment, wherein I use the analytic lens provided by anthropological understandings of the co-production of social and spatial relations to investigate the ways those productive processes also include consideration of the agencies of nonhuman life and ecological relations.

In adopting this framework I draw inspiration from Cindi Katz's concept of the social reproduction of the environment (2004). This concept holds that environments—understood as the material conditions that make human life possible—must be produced and maintained, just as children are educated, social bodies maintained, and cultural traditions passed on. Approaching urban environments as things which must be socially reproduced provides a way of thinking about gardening and beekeeping that attends to the ways these activities are embedded within and constitutive of social relations while also explicitly addressing relations to nonhuman life and embeddedness within particular ecosystems. In other words, we can analyze Laura's gardening and beekeeping as efforts to produce and maintain relationships amongst humans, nonhumans, and the spaces they inhabited.

Considering gardening and beekeeping through the lens of social reproduction also keeps open the possibility that gardens and beehives might be sites for exploring new kinds of relationality amongst human and nonhuman beings (Alaimo 2016; Gibson-Graham 2006; Tsing 2015). For these sites are particular in that gardeners and beekeepers like Laura are laboring to make *specific kinds* of environments, ones that draw attention to ordinary land use practices wherein yards are not used purposefully for material sustenance and nonhuman habitat, and suggest possibilities for urban environments where people and nature jointly nurtured one another (Loftus 2012). In the previous two chapters (4 and 5) I have considered the kinds of labor entailed

⁶⁵ While this literature does not *a priori* exclude the environment, considerations of nonhuman life or nature are seldom taken up in the anthropology of space and place, particularly as regards urban contexts (though nature is given far more attention in works on place, see for example Escobar 2008; Feld 1996). My use of environment in this context is thus a strategic departure intended to address this relative inattention.

by gardening, the ways Elmwoodites used this activity to enact care for their households, communities, and ecosystems and effect a sense of reconnection to land and labor. Beginning with this chapter (and continuing in the following, Chapter 7), I turn to an examination of what gardeners produce through their caring creative labor. I start, as suggested above, with an investigation of the kinds of environments Elmwood's gardeners produced.

To accomplish this I bring together the experiences of two of Laura's fellow gardeners, Anna, also a beekeeper in Hilltop, and Ms. Dolores, a community garden steward in Tremont, to investigate both *how* these individuals produced urban environments through gardening and beekeeping, and *what kinds* of environments these activities were intended to produce. I begin with the example of Anna, a white, eco-conscious gardener and beekeeper in a primarily white, middle-class neighborhood. With sufficient individual resources available to devote to the private fulfillment of outdoor recreation and youth education, gardeners like Anna were able to place a greater emphasis on care for urban ecosystems. I use Anna's narrative, and the questions she herself poses about the inclusion of working-class people and people of color within Elmwood's alternative agrifood community, to set up the narrative of Ms. Dolores, a black, working class community gardener. For in the working-class and majority African-American neighborhood in which she lived, the community garden tended by Ms. Dolores played an important role in providing public green space and safe places for youth to gather and to learn. I conclude by comparing the stories of these two women, considering the ways different forms of care enacted through gardening shape, and are shaped by, the production of urban environments and what recognition of such diverse caring projects can bring to the work of building more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable lives for human and nonhuman beings alike.

Anna: Caring for Place and Preparing for Uncertain Socioecological Futures

More than a few of the gardeners and beekeepers I spoke with during my ethnographic research in Elmwood evinced a kind of jocular millenarianism. Gardening and keeping bees, they noted,

are useful skills to have should our current agricultural and transport systems collapse, as more dire accounts of climate change impacts predict they will (see for example the work of Michael Pollan or Bill McKibben; see also Beddington et al. 2012; Vermeulen, Campbell, and Ingram 2012). So it was not particularly surprising when, during an early interview in 2011, Anna, a white, middle-aged gardener and beekeeper, began talking somewhat matter-of-factly about her “post-apocalyptic livelihood.”

But my thinking in becoming a beekeeper was that in a future of lower energy,⁶⁶ what will I have to trade with that will be of value? And I thought sugar, alcohol!⁶⁷ [Laughter from both Anna and I] Two very powerful currencies. . . I don't think I could do a plantation of sugar beets, nor can you really grow sugar cane, so I thought honey. That's sustainable. And now with the [Honeybee Initiative], I'm sort of making my work and life all congruent.

Anna continued, explaining how the Honeybee Initiative's efforts to establish communal smallholdings of bees throughout the city and cultivate survivor bee populations adapted to Michigan helped make her post-apocalyptic job even more sustainable.

While gardeners like Anna used humor to keep their discussions of uncertain futures from becoming too earnest-sounding or anxiety-inducing (many assured me they were not “tin foil hat wearing doomsayers”) these narratives were where interviewees spoke candidly about their concern for the future and their hopes that difficult, dramatic social and ecological change might supply the motivation and means for building a better future. Anna and others evinced very real concern about what the impacts of rising global temperatures, erratic weather patterns, increasing socioeconomic inequality, and mounting political instability might hold for their families and communities. They considered gardening and beekeeping a way to get a jump on things and work

⁶⁶ This is a reference to a previous thread of our conversation where Anna discussed the impacts of peak oil and climate change, and her belief that in the near future less energy will be available to society and to adapt we will need to re-localize economic and cultural life and consume fewer resources.

⁶⁷ A reference to her wife's brewing and fermenting activities; she makes beer, wine, and mead.

toward a future where relationships among human and nonhuman beings nurtured mutual flourishing, rather than precarity. For most of the gardeners and beekeepers who engaged in these kinds of conversations about socioecologically precarious futures, including Anna, these activities operated on two different levels. On a basic material level, gardening was a way to build their skills and have resources in place for the future—a kind of care for the household through alternative livelihood strategies. On another level, though, these activities, undertaken in relation to other human and nonhuman beings, were about rendering communities and ecosystems more sustainable, better able to withstand the vagaries of uncertain futures.

During our 2011 interview Anna critiqued the role of consumption in modern American culture, and its contribution to socioecological precarity, asserting the need to find alternative sources of meaning. I asked her what some such sources of meaning might be: “Well, gardening. And touching the earth—for me, that is the huge depth of meaning in my life. Not just planting a seed and watching it grow, which is of course a beautiful thing. But providing food for myself and my family are also deeply meaningful things. Self-reliance, interconnectedness, not only with other people, but other beings on the earth.” This sense that one can derive meaning in life through growing one’s own food developed over the course of Anna’s life, from helping out on her family’s farm during her rural East Coast childhood to becoming a longtime community gardener in Michigan. It also informed the ways she related to her fellow Elmwoodites, prompting her to help start several different cooperative gardening and beekeeping projects in the city with the goal of supporting others striving for similar, non-consumption based ways of life.

The sense of connection to others, both human and nonhuman, Anna cultivates through gardening is inextricably linked to her spiritual life. As a young adult, drawing on influences from Native American spiritual practices and pre-Christian European beliefs, Anna sought to experience the divine in nature. In 1997 she attended a lecture on the concept of “environmental footprint,” and from that point on, she explained, she engaged in a more impassioned environmentalism, wedding her spiritual beliefs to a deep concern about climate change and

ecological sustainability. As she explained in our 2013 interview, “My spirituality is all earth-based and I feel that it’s really important for anyone who’s interested in sustainability to view the earth as sacred, to view our place, here as sacred . . . to fall in love with our place and to make that an aspect of community life.” Given the importance of both place and nature to Anna, I asked her why she had decided to settle in a city.

We have to love nature and we have to realize that our cities and our towns are nature. You know wilderness is nice, but, for one thing, humans are a pack animal, a social animal. We live in groups. We cannot be self-sufficient; we have to be inter-dependent on other humans. I don’t believe that you can farm and arm.⁶⁸ I believe it’s the wrong choice, the wrong direction. You can’t, humans are not meant to be isolated from one another. We’re meant to live in communities, and, at the same time as we live in communities, we have to find a way to live sustainably on the earth and, love the earth and the nature that really is here.

Here Anna’s language evokes scholarly work that regards place as the emergent product of social relations tied in some way to the shared, embodied experience of everyday life in a particular physical setting (Escobar 2001, 2008; Massey 1994). In calling forth such an understanding of place, Anna articulated an understanding of the world wherein sustainability could only be realized through ethical commitments to the well-being of those nonhuman and human beings with whom she created and experienced place. In other words, for Anna a sustainable way of life was predicated on care for communities and ecosystems.

Gardening and beekeeping were key ways in which Anna realized these caring commitments. Her home garden used permaculture-style methods; she selected perennial and native species when possible, considered her gardens habitat and partnerships with an abundance of species from soil fungi to pollinating insects, and reincorporated waste through practices like

⁶⁸ This is a phrase Anna uses to refer to a particular strain of “back-to-the-land” movements she characterizes as “moving out to the thirty acres and stock-piling ammunition and trying to be completely self-sufficient.”

composting for a “closed-loop” system. When I asked her why she employed such methods, Anna told me about the various birds that had taken to visiting and nesting in her garden and about the joy encounters with these avian inhabitants brought to her life, increasing her sense of connectedness to the earth. Outside her home Anna helps run or participates in numerous collective or communal gardening projects, such as the Honeybee Initiative and a community garden. While she bemusedly claimed that these activities were all undertaken out of self-interest, to make Elmwood into the kind of socioecologically sustainable city she wanted to live in, she also spoke to her desire to secure socioecological futures wherein all Elmwoodites could flourish and the importance of creating opportunities for others to learn about and participate in sustainable living. Indeed, many of the gardeners with whom I spoke in Elmwood considered her a role model and inspiration in this regard.

Yet it was in her attempts to care for the residents of Elmwood, as well as their ecosystems, that Anna’s gardening and beekeeping efforts met with limitation and resistance. Anna lives in Hilltop, one of Elmwood’s more affluent and majority white neighborhoods. Most homes are occupied and there are no abandoned or boarded up houses with overgrown yards. In fact, two of Anna’s neighbors reported buying the adjacent home in order to ensure it continued to meet their aesthetic standards. In Hilltop these standards consist of mown lawns, extensive landscaping (which may include front-yard gardens; Anna’s grass-free lawn was a bit of an exception in this regard), and well-maintained homes with no chipping paint or hanging gutters. There are two parks in the neighborhood, both considered safe and well-used. One also hosts a pool and community center. There are also two community gardens and residents are within walking distance of several schools and the downtown business district. In addition, Anna’s workplace is in Old Yards, the city’s most affluent business district, known for its preserved historic architecture and tourist destinations. Thus, in her day-to-day life Anna was not required to extensively interact with racial or class difference.

It was through her vegetable gardening, beekeeping, community activities, and mentoring that Anna felt she first truly encountered the fractures in Elmwood's sociospatial landscape, running along lines of inequalities based on differences of class and race. Nearing the end of our interview in 2013 Anna reflected: "My one regret is that I feel like there's not enough cross-pollination between the black community and the white community in Elmwood. . .there's too much segregation, too much racism, too much isolation. That's the area for working more." She went on to describe her involvement, along with a group of like-minded white, working to middle-class women, in the founding of a cooperative orchard on a vacant lot in one of the city's majority African-American neighborhoods. She explained the efforts she and others had made to include the neighborhood's residents in the project—setting aside space for vegetable gardens, employing neighborhood youth to do basic maintenance—and opined the difficulty in defining together with this community common goals and joint projects for making Elmwood a healthier, happier, more socioecologically secure place to live.⁶⁹

In our 2011 interview she discussed in similar terms the challenges of building a sustainability movement across class lines. While she and her wife are both well-educated, own their home, and are financially secure, Anna grew up in a working-class family on the East Coast, and worked throughout her childhood on her brother-in-law's farm. She spoke with compassion and candor as we discussed what makes sustainability activism in Elmwood easier or more challenging.

Because we're more of a working-class town there's less privilege and people who've grown up in poverty have not had consumerism as the sole site of meaning in their lives.

⁶⁹ As of 2017, Anna was continuing to work on issues of community inclusion and racial justice. In the intervening three years, she had become active in several local racial justice activist organizations, facilitated the addition of a black man to the board of the cooperative orchard, and continued to employ neighborhood youth. She and her fellow cooperative orchard members had begun a campaign of "gentle" outreach to neighbors, explaining the purpose of the orchard, sharing fruit, and inviting participation. They had also successfully invited the neighborhood charter school to be involved in several orchard events. Anna reiterated the concerns she had with building relationships between the orchard and surrounding neighborhood, but remained committed to a process of patient outreach and organic growth in relationships.

Yet at the same time, a lot of times in working class culture, [people are] looking to get stuff that privileged people have had. And you see that expressed in all kinds of ways. So when you turn to people who've grown up without stuff and say, what you've done in your life has great meaning, but then they're like, I don't want to wash dishes by hand, I want a dishwasher. You know what I mean?

While it was clear in Anna's conversations with me and in her caring labors throughout Elmwood that she worked hard to refrain from judging others for a lack of participation or buy-in, she also struggled to understand how and why differences of class and race affected participation in sustainability movements, lamenting that those who often had to do without still desired the latest 'fancy gadget' rather than embracing a movement that celebrated not having such things. Nor was Anna alone in these sentiments. Several of the white, middle-class gardeners who formed the bulk of my research participants identified and were troubled by the race and class based divisions they observed in Elmwood's alternative agrifood community and in the city more broadly. Like Anna though, they frequently found themselves searching for explanations as to why these divisions persisted and how they might be bridged. One of Anna's fellow Hilltop community gardeners spoke about her efforts to become involved in gardening projects that served the Williams-Bell neighborhood and similar black, poor to working-class communities as a way to address these concerns. This involvement had, however, left her feeling uncomfortable; she felt that in the end, rather than working with these communities on a project that both considered important, she was doing a kind of charity work that the community itself did not necessarily consider a priority.

Anna and other eco-conscious gardeners and beekeepers were deeply engaged in the work of social reproduction. They undertook relations of care with their households, communities, and ecosystems in ways intended to secure the material and social bases of economic relations and everyday life (cf. Katz 2004), and to do so in ways that generated greater social equity and ecological sustainability. Yet racial and class divides persisted, in their collective efforts and in

Elmwood, and in so doing limited the scope of any ecological gains these efforts garnered, stymying possibilities for city-wide transformations. Research by scholars such as Alkon (2012; see also Guthman 2008; Slocum 2007) have trenchantly elucidated the ways race and class are reproduced through alternative food practices like urban gardening, as these practices are used to mark different kinds of urban space and actors with certain racialized and classed identities. Such mechanisms of racial spatialization and class distinction are certainly at work in Elmwood. Yet community gardening occurred across race and class lines in Elmwood. How did gardening differ with respect to race- and class-based differences? And can an understanding of how these variations came to be shed light on the “isolation” and lack of “cross-pollination” that troubled Anna and contributed to the ways white, middle-class gardeners in Elmwood came to think about African-American and working-class gardeners in the city, if they considered them at all?

Ms. Dolores: Nurturing and Sustaining Relationships with Nature and Community

I had never seen so many people attend a Tremont Community Meeting as I did for the Habitat for Humanity kick-off in spring 2014. I estimated over fifty people from this predominantly African-American, working-class neighborhood had stuffed into the church meeting room hosting the gathering. The excitement was palpable as community organizers from Habitat explained their program to purchase and refurbish vacant homes, numbers of which had been rising for decades, but had spiked with the recent housing market collapse (2008) and closure of the nearby automotive manufacturing facility (2010). They also outlined their plans for two important community projects: repairing the fence along the walking path and constructing a picnic pavilion at the Tremont Community Center (TCC). These Habitat-sponsored projects were unique to Tremont, a recognition that in this neighborhood investment in safe, outdoor recreational spaces was both needed and desired.

Tremont began as a suburban development in the mid-twentieth century to house workers from the nearby automobile plant, and consists to this day of winding streets lined with small

brick homes and shady trees. The neighborhood is located in Elmwood Township, but retains close ties to the City. The neighborhood attained its demographic character through proximity to factories and the spatialization of racial and class inequality driven by deindustrialization and neoliberalism. Initially attracted to the short commute and the lack of anywhere else in the city willing to house them, working class and black residents settled in Tremont. As unemployment and depopulation increased from the 1970s on, while state investment in social services decreased, the neighborhood's fortunes declined; residents witnessed their property values and standards of living fall and the character of the neighborhood change. As one resident described it, the increased number of renters meant people came and went, making it harder to know your neighbors. Even if people did stick around, they were struggling to make ends meet and had little time to invest in community life.

Cultivating community life had also become more difficult in Tremont for the lack of space to do it in. The neighborhood's park was widely considered unsafe—"I see people shooting craps in there all the time and the police do nothing" one disgruntled resident told me in an aside during a neighborhood association meeting. With the demise of the factory the union hall closed, and regional population loss had prompted school district consolidations and the closure of both neighborhood schools in Tremont. What remained were a handful of churches and the TCC. Maintaining the latter was an ongoing struggle, as neighborhood residents cobbled together dwindling funds from local governments and grants from the more prosperous surrounding county. Thus, Habitat's commitment to Tremont's recreational infrastructure was a much needed and desired boon to the neighborhood.

In the hubbub of the Habitat meeting I did not get a chance to speak with Ms. Dolores. A black grandmother and indefatigable community leader, she was busily moving about making sure the meeting went smoothly. Speaking to her afterward, she expressed a guarded optimism. Habitat had tried to come into Tremont once before, she told me, in the 1990s when things were really bad in the neighborhood, after a decade of deindustrialization had led to rising rates of

unemployment and outmigration. They had not been well-received and quickly left, but Ms. Dolores thought this time around would be different. “They’re doing things right,” she said with a nod. I reckoned Ms. Dolores would know. She had lived in Tremont for most of her adult life, remaining committed to the neighborhood through all its ups and down. Upon retiring from her job in a nearby automotive plant in the mid-2000s, Ms. Dolores devoted even more time to Tremont, running a day camp for neighborhood children, serving on the neighborhood association board, and contributing to the community garden.⁷⁰

Gardening, in fact, was a big part of Ms. Dolores’ community work in Tremont, and in a 2011 interview I asked her to tell me more about her personal history with gardening. I knew her family had kept a garden growing up and that she had learned from her parents, both African-American migrants from the rural South. I wondered what gardening was like for her as a child and why she continued to garden after all these years.

I think it’s just a part of me. I enjoy flowers. Anything, anything outdoors is me. You know, I’m sixty and I still like to camp? I still like to hike, I still like gardening! Whether it’s flowers, whether it’s vegetables, whatever it is, I still like doing those things. I see the benefit of it physically, it helps me get my exercise. Just to go out and just the calmness, it’s a time that I can meditate. I really enjoy it. I enjoy it if I have to do it myself, but I enjoy it more if I can do it with someone. And that’s what it is to me. And I don’t care if my garden gets small, probably will have one till the day I die.

Ms. Dolores chuckled at the thought, and then continued, telling me about her mother, who was eighty-six and still gardening.

Over the course of our time together I came to understand a little better what Ms. Dolores meant when she said “gardening is a part of me.” In one sense, it was a materially significant part. Both as a child and a young working mother, Ms. Dolores had relied on her garden, and canning

⁷⁰ I met Ms. Dolores in her role as camp director in 2009 when I helped start the gardening program at the camp (discussed below) as part of my job at a local non-profit.

the surplus, to feed her family and keep her household costs in check. Gardening was more than a livelihood strategy though, as Ms. Dolores indicated when she spoke about her love of nature. As I reflected on the many quiet hours we spent hoeing weeds together in the Tremont Community Garden—Ms. Dolores was the steward there for many years—and heard multiple stories of family camping trips, I realized Ms. Dolores was a woman who spent her entire working life on a factory floor. Hiking in the woods and tending her garden restored her because being in nature was a chance for her to *be* differently—to meditate, to find calm, to labor for herself (and her family). In creating relationships to the non-human beings that comprise nature in this sense, she was able to care for herself, as well as her family.

Ms. Dolores and the Tremont Community Garden both used organic methods of gardening with the specific intention of limiting the exposure of human and nonhuman beings alike to toxic chemicals. She and the other community gardeners did not speak about their organic methods at length, referencing them matter-of-factly, but always in terms of their understanding that chemical fertilizers and pesticides were harmful to people and urban ecosystems alike, and to be avoided. While Ms. Dolores did not discuss the benefits of local food with me, another Tremont community gardener did, citing the ways local foods, like those acquired through gardening, helped her health, the environment, and the local economy. Though brief, these comments demonstrate that in providing pesticide-free, local food the Tremont Community Garden was meant to care for ecosystems too.

Through her work with the Tremont Community Garden and neighborhood summer camp, Ms. Dolores was also able to use gardening to care for her community. She kept a few things in a little garden plot at her home, but liked being able to come out to the TCC as it gave her the chance to garden with neighbors and build new relationships. She told me that in the summer of 2010 she had a gardening partner who lived on the other side of the neighborhood. “I was able to find out what was going on at her end and keep checking up on her grandson, who’s part of the summer program, see what he’s up to at the end of the summer.” Maintaining those

relationships with youth is particularly important to Ms. Dolores, and creating a garden program as part of the youth summer camp she managed was one way she achieved that. During a drizzly day working in the garden in July 2014 Ms. Dolores mentioned to me that five children from the 2013 summer camp session had kept coming out to the garden to help with weeding and harvesting after camp had ended for the year. This brought Ms. Dolores much joy, and I recalled something she told me during our 2011 interview when I asked why she thought the garden was such an important part of the camp. “I’m hoping with the children in the area being involved in it, that they’ll want to have gardens, or maybe start in their home, or continue to do it and it gets passed on and they tell people about it. Because they’re always so proud to show mom and dad what they got!” Teaching children to garden was important to Ms. Dolores, and to the members of a local foster grandparent program who volunteered at the camp, because it appeared to them that the transmission of gardening skills and knowledge had been interrupted. The current generation of parents (approximately 30–50 years old) were said by just about everyone I talked to about the matter more broadly in Tremont and in Elmwood, to be the least likely to garden. Youth gardening programs like the one in Tremont focused on repairing this gap by instructing children and hopefully interesting their parents.⁷¹

Ms. Dolores readily acknowledged though, that there were many challenges to increased involvement from parents, foremost among them time. She reflected that these days parents have to work two or three jobs to make ends meet. The strain put on working families, from the middle classes to the poor, by America’s neoliberal political economy of labor is well-

⁷¹ My survey data also support this notion, with the 30–50-year-old age group the least represented. However, this may be due to a lack of response from this reportedly very busy demographic. It should also be noted that my sample was not representative nor were my results statistically significant. As for the purported causes of this gap, as I discuss later in this section, the political economy of labor, particularly for working class laborers, is such that little time or resources are available for leisure pursuits like gardening. It is also possible that the suburban aesthetics that these individuals’ working and middle-class parents (the “baby boomers”) so rigidly hewed to, and the politics of class mobility whereby baby boomers moving from working to middle class status hoped to distance themselves and their children from quintessential working class behaviors like gardening and food preservation, contributed to the lack of gardening practice among 30–50 year olds. As I discuss further below, race likely also plays a role in this gap for the Tremont community. To date little research has examined gardening as an intergenerational relationship or the intergenerational transmission of gardening knowledge (Taylor and Lovell 2014).

documented (see Collins et al. 2008; Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Harvey 2005; Katz 2012; McDowell 2004). Exhorted to be flexible and responsible, which translates into longer work hours for less pay while bearing increased costs of living and financial responsibilities for education, healthcare, and retirement, these working families have little time or resources left for leisure pursuits like gardening. While few of the Elmwoodites with whom I spoke cited financial constraints, time was by far the most frequent and prominent obstacle named by gardeners and non-gardeners alike.

Yet unspoken in this account of class and labor was the role race played in structuring Tremont residents' relationship to gardening. While for Ms. Dolores gardening was an important way of preserving historical continuity with her family of Southern black farmers, and a sense of cultural pride and heritage, for others it was a painful reminder of the violence of slavery, share-cropping, and an on-going system of race that reduces black people to their physical labor (cf. White 2011). The only Elmwoodites to ever name the relationship of race and gardening in this way to me—a white woman—were African-American children, more than one of whom told me under no uncertain terms were they going to work in the dirt. Thus, it is hard to know the extent to which race disrupted the intergenerational practice of gardening among Tremont resident's.

The youth garden was about more than the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and skills though. The camp, which was founded in 2001 and runs for approximately nine weeks during the summer, is staffed by volunteers with food, basic supplies, and funding for high-school age counselors provided by the County Recreation Department. The purpose of the camp, as Ms. Dolores explained it to me, is to “give kids some place to go, a safe place in the summer time. A place to grow and give them some positive ideas to do with their time,” such as gardening. Such places are always needed, but particularly so in Tremont. Katz (2001) has analyzed neoliberalism as a kind of public disinvestment in social reproduction, in resources for education, public spaces, infrastructure, family wages, childcare resources, and welfare. Just as the effects of these disinvestments are felt in parents' day-to-day lives as they struggle with meager resources and

little time, so too do they manifest in the day-to-day environments of the neighborhood in which Tremont's children and other residents live. Histories of racial and class inequality have shaped life in the neighborhood such that residents had few personal resources to invest in maintaining their homes and public spaces and little time to devote to community projects, while the cash-strapped local government had little ability or desire to provide basic services to Tremont, let alone improve infrastructure and public spaces and provide community programming. Governmental discourse, from the local to state and federal levels, held that scarce resources were to be devoted to attracting economic investment, not providing for residents who could not, or would not, take care of themselves. As a result, the environment in which Tremont's children lived—the opportunities for outdoor recreation, the availability of public gathering spaces, the maintenance of land and infrastructure—suffered.

The Tremont Community Garden and concomitant youth programming thus can be viewed as an effort by Ms. Dolores and her fellow volunteers to ameliorate these deficits in the social reproduction of the environment. The goal of this labor is to provide their neighbors, specifically children, with a caring, and cared for, public green space. In using gardening to fulfill this aim, however, Ms. Dolores also brings together care for community and for ecosystem. Like Anna, she is working to cultivate a particular kind of environment, in this case one where Tremont's children have safe access to outdoor recreation, learn traditional skills like vegetable gardening, and in so doing have the opportunity to cultivate the kinds of relationships to nature that Ms. Dolores herself finds so deeply rewarding and restorative. In this way, Ms. Dolores' project of social reproduction of the environment differs markedly from Anna's. While both are attempting to create specific kinds of being in the world through constructing certain types of environment, Anna does so by first caring for nonhuman beings, following the logic that thriving populations of pollinators will also benefit people, and working to create a community based around mutual care for nonhuman life. For Ms. Dolores, people, particularly children, are the

primary focus of her care work; her logic is that humans must be provided nurturing environments if they are to take on caring relationships with other people and nonhuman beings.

Social Reproduction of the Environment in Elmwood and Beyond

Both types of care work, that which emphasizes people and that which emphasizes nonhuman beings, were considered vital and necessary by most of the gardeners with whom I spoke. Yet the differences in the ways Anna and Ms. Dolores constructed and implemented their caring projects are instructive, drawing attention to the differential availability of material and social resources and the political-economic and social contexts in which their labor occurs. In other words, we must consider not only the environments Anna and Ms. Dolores were producing via caring projects, but the manner in which they were able to do so. For the ways Anna and Ms. Dolores (and others in Elmwood) engaged in projects of care for household, community, and ecosystem through gardening and beekeeping were directly influenced by histories and experiences of inequalities based on differences of class and race. When Ms. Dolores teaches children to grow vegetables in a community garden, she is passing on cultural heritage and creating public green space. These acts are undertaken in response to the types of disinvestment, operating through differences of class and race, that have interrupted the transmission of gardening knowledge and left Tremont with few safe, outdoor spaces for recreation and community life. While Ms. Dolores personally values gardening for the relationship it allows her to have with nature, and directly cares for ecosystems through activities such as organic gardening methods, she feels compelled to prioritize in her community work providing environments where children can feel cared for and experience the possibility of creating a relationship to nonhuman beings via gardening. In short, for Ms. Dolores gardening was a way of both claiming space for her community and making possible a particular kind of relationship to the urban environment.

Meanwhile Anna lives in a far more secure day-to-day environment. It is not that she does not value outdoor recreational spaces or teaching children, but that these things are not

struggles in her neighborhood. She and her neighbors can walk to several different, safe, parks and community gardens, and schools within walking distance of the neighborhood offer after-school gardening programs. Households have greater economic security, and while time is still reported as a constraint, many residents are able to engage in gardening or other outdoor hobbies. In this context, where race and class align to provide basic and immediate environmental security, Anna and her fellow eco-conscious gardeners have more resources available to devote to caring for nonhuman beings. Anna has the time, as well as the material resources, technical knowledge, and relationships to people like the food co-op manager, necessary to transform her yard into a permaculture garden and pursue collective beekeeping projects. These efforts do benefit Anna's community; they increase Elmwood's species diversity and provide locally-grown, more ecologically sustainable food, as well as opportunities for people to come together around these mutual interests. This type of care for community is important to Anna and those gardeners and beekeepers like her, but is frequently seen as complementary to an imperative to care for ecosystems. For Anna, care for ecosystems is care for community, since the latter is necessarily embedded within the former.

Which is not to say that Ms. Dolores does not recognize this connected embeddedness. What the difference in inflection between these two women's caring projects, between care for community and care for ecosystem, do tell us is that for working class communities and communities of color, care for the environment often takes on much more existentially immediate issues, as scholars of environmental justice movements have long pointed out (Checker 2005; McGurty 2009; Taylor 2016). In other words, care for the environment is not always about making nonhuman habitat, but about creating human habitats that make pleasurable, reciprocal relationships to nonhuman life possible. This chain of effect is evident in the experience of certain gardeners, like Maria (discussed in Chapter 4), whose initial relationship to gardening was framed by a history of family practice defined by economic necessity and cultural heritage. As an adult, Maria's gardening transformed, as it led her to deeper relationships with nonhuman beings like

honeybees and became an important way she cared for, and connected to, local and global ecosystems.

Gender

While I have dealt in this chapter with the ways deindustrialization and neoliberalism are variably experienced based on differences of race and class, scholars have also investigated the importance of gender in shaping differential experiences of these processes, particularly when considered as forms of disinvestment in social reproduction. Social reproduction and care are gendered forms of labor, performed disproportionately by women in American society, and thus these disinvestments have outsized impacts on women's lives. Wekerle (2005) draws attention to the disproportionate impact of neoliberal policies on women in her research with community gardeners in Toronto. Here women built a collective food producing enterprise in order to meet the needs of their households and community for fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate foods and livelihoods. By appropriating public space for domestic labor, Wekerle argues that these women make visible the work of social reproduction, and in so doing reinvigorate claims to public support for this work.

While Anna and Ms. Dolores were not attempting to render domestic work public, what Wekerle's study reminds us is that gardening, when understood as a form of care and social reproduction, must also be considered a gendered form of labor. In my study, while both men and women gardened, the majority of gardeners, particularly those involved in collective projects like community gardens, were women. They did not, however, talk about their gardening in gendered terms.⁷² Rather, they consistently framed their labor in terms of care and ethical responsibilities—frameworks that are consistently gendered as feminine (Buch 2015; Federici 2012; Gilligan 1982; Ginsburg and Rapp 1991). Given this cultural framing, and the overwhelming presence of women

⁷² It should be noted, however, that I did not ask questions regarding gendered experience, or meant to elicit reflections on gender difference in gardening.

as gardeners in Elmwood, leaving gender unremarked arguably served to reproduce it, validating the assumption that it is women who care and who ought to compensate for institutional disinvestment in social reproduction. The relationship of gender and gardening as care work, in Elmwood and elsewhere thus warrants further attention and research.

Conclusion

Framing gardening and beekeeping as ways of producing of urban environments provides an analytic approach that draws on anthropological insights about the ways people produce urban space and urban spaces produce people, while also considering the importance of nonhuman life and relationships to nature in these processes. This framework also produces two significant insights about care for communities and ecosystems in small, urban places like Elmwood. The first is that care for the environment does not only emerge among those self-identifying as environmentalists or sustainability activists (though I should say that Ms. Dolores and other Tremont residents did think of themselves as environmentally-minded people). Recognizing this, however, requires us to examine not only different locations, like working-class, majority African-American neighborhoods, but also different kinds of care, like that for children. What Ms. Dolores implicitly understood was that if youth, like the children of Tremont, are to become the type of people that nurture the well-being of multispecies urban ecosystems Laura spoke of, they must first have the opportunity to experience a relationship to nature (see also Finney 2014). As gardening provides Ms. Dolores with just such a relationship, so she uses gardening to care for Tremont's youth, creating safe outdoor environments that extend the possibilities of relationships to plants, soil, and insects.

The second insight regarding care for communities and ecosystems that the experiences of Anna and Ms. Dolores reveal is that throughout diverse communities there is a shared sense that we ought to care for our environments, that they ought to be places where multiple species, be they honeybees, garden tomatoes, or young humans, can live and be nurtured. As the threats

posed by global climate change make the well-being of ecosystems an increasingly immediate existential issue for all people, the ability to recognize the multiple ways that care for community and ecosystem are entangled in the social reproduction of the environment becomes imperative. Creating multispecies flourishing requires more than attention to the needs of any one specie, human or otherwise. Rather, thinking in terms of the production of the environment encourages us to consider the ways environments come to be made and inhabited through unequal social and political-economic relations, while continuing to create and imagine those environments in which we would wish to live, those which would nurture the well-being of myriad species both now and into the future.

Yet this shared sense of ethical commitment to care for others through a kind of unalienated labor is more or less voluntary, depending on, for example, one's class position. For black, working-class residents of neighborhoods like Tremont, enduring through decades of systemic social and institutional disinvestment, caring for others has been required for the day-to-day survival of the community. Similarly, for those gardeners who grow food their households need and otherwise could not afford, unalienated labor may be pleasurable, but is also necessary. Thus, I argue that gardening, as a way of producing urban environments, is experienced by Elmwoodites in two often simultaneous ways. On the one hand, it is a practice that, for at least some, is borne of necessity, a way to provide for environmental needs in the face of continuing disinvestment. On the other hand, it is also a materialization of opposition to the adjudication of value according to market logics and lack of adequate policy responses to climate change and persistent social inequality; it is an opposition emerging from a logic of care (Mol 2008) predicated on an ongoing commitment to the well-being of others. Insofar as these two different experiences of gardening track existing inequalities based on differences of class and race, they are often in tension with one another. And within Elmwood's context of race-based inequality and processes of class formation these tensions often result in the maintenance of the differences that generated them. That is to say, answers to the lingering questions raised by Anna and other

white, middle class gardeners about “isolation” between black and white, middle and working class, gardening populations may be found in the different experiences of Elmwood’s urban environment generated by historic and on-going race and class based inequalities. In the following chapter I further examine these differences and their effects by considering the complex ways gardening, as a type of production of the urban environment, shapes, and is shaped by, processes of class formation and unequal experiences of land use policy and aesthetics.

Chapter 7: Hippies and Fuddy-duddies: The Role of Gardening and Beekeeping in Environmental Gentrification

When I arrived in Elmwood in September 2013, the City was wrapping up the public input phase of its master planning process. All year City staff, in partnership with a private firm, had been soliciting public input on topics ranging from Elmwood's core values to changes in the zoning code. By October most of the process was complete and only the issue of zoning, specifically switching to a form-based zoning code,⁷³ remained. I was aware that the planning team was holding charrettes to solicit public input on these proposed zoning changes, and had noted to myself the need to attend one. Then on October 9 I received a mass text from a friend and research participant urging all her contacts to attend the day's zoning charrette. This was our opportunity, she explained, to demonstrate public support for regulations permitting hoopouses throughout the City.⁷⁴ Logging on to Facebook (one of the primary platforms the master planning input teams was using to communicate with the public) I found a flurry of posts in my feed about the afternoon's charrette, already under way. The hoopouse supporters were out in numbers, but wind of the guerilla campaign had reached those who opposed hoopouses, who were now themselves showing up in greater numbers to influence the process. Pro-hoopouse friends were attempting to use Facebook to get the word out and rally more supporters to the charrette. This, I thought, should be a very interesting fieldwork experience.

And indeed it was. By the time I arrived at the charrette around 4pm, the comment

⁷³ Most zoning codes in the United States are based on function; certain types of land uses are allowed in certain geographic areas. However, beginning in the early 2000s municipalities around the country began switching to form-based codes. These codes regulate the appearance of the built environment, with only secondary concern for function. Form-based codes are intended to provide cities with a flexible means to combat urban sprawl, preserve historic neighborhoods, and cultivate mixed use development (see www.formbasedcodes.org). However, these codes, a key tool in the New Urbanist movement, have been critiqued for their attempts to manufacture a past form of organic urbanism and for their reliance on public input processes that can further exclude already isolated groups, such as racial minorities (Inniss 2007; Lawrence-Zúñiga 2015).

⁷⁴ Hoopouses, also known as passive solar greenhouses, are structures of variable size that consist of a metal arch frame over which clear heavy plastic is stretched. By trapping air inside and allowing it to be heated by the sun these structures extend the growing season for fruits and vegetables by several months, allowing earlier planting and later harvesting. See the section of this chapter entitled "Of Master Plans and Hoopouses" (p. 175) for a more extensive discussion.

section—large sheets of blank paper taped to a wall where participants could leave open-ended suggestions about what they would like the City’s zoning code to do—was dominated by hoophouse discussion, most of it in support. In later interviews with two of the city officials involved in the charrette that day, both expressed dismay with how the pro-hoophouse faction had participated in that particular charrette, and how supporters of urban agriculture⁷⁵ in general had engaged with the master planning process. They behaved, as one put it, as a “single-issue special interest group,” and had not participated in the broader planning process, such as shaping the City’s core values. Their concern with hoophouses, and urban agriculture more broadly, the official reported, emerged only in the zoning input process and “was not particularly helpful” in crafting a broader plan for the City’s future. As another official put it, the depth of knowledge among supporters of urban agriculture varied widely; some had well-articulated input, others just said what they’d heard others say. Sympathetic to the pro-hoophouse cause, this official lamented that those opposed to permitting hoophouses would likely push the idea that “widespread support [was] being orchestrated by a relatively narrow group of people.” In other words, the parameters for continued conflict over the place of hoophouses, and urban agriculture in general, in Elmwood’s zoning ordinance and other public policies were already set. These officials, and many other Elmwoodites with whom I spoke on the matter (and, initially, myself as well) framed the debate as follows: on one side a very vocal, active, and perhaps single-minded faction trying to advance an agenda of land use change; on the other a reactionary core of conservative residents.

⁷⁵ In this chapter I shift from referring to urban gardening and livestock raising to primarily discussing urban agriculture or alternative agrifood practices. As previously discussed, the latter term is meant to encompass the full range of food-based practices, from backyard gardens to farmers’ markets, that are commonly associated with one another and treated as parts of a more-or-less unified social movement. I take up the term urban agriculture in this chapter to denote that in public planning and development conversations the home and community gardens, hives, and coops that I have been discussing thus far were often associated with more entrepreneurial endeavors, including farming for profit and processing homegrown food for sale. The logic for this conflation, by supporters, was that attempting to earn a living and trying to make a little extra cash from one’s surplus were both potentially significant contributions to the city’s economic life and ecological sustainability. Notably, those who opposed urban agriculture in the City were far more likely to make a distinction here in order to disassociate what they considered acceptable gardening and livestock raising practices from the introduction of a food-production based economic sector to the City.

Throughout the next year, as I interviewed a range of Elmwoodites (though admittedly primarily supporters of urban agriculture) and participated in all kinds of civic, governmental, and gardening activities, I found this simple progressive–conservative binary to be too facile an explanation. Gardeners across differences of race and class were engaged in the production of their environments. That is, they were actively engaged in making the day-to-day social, spatial, and ecological conditions in which they lived. While many of these gardeners did so out of desires to care for household, community, and ecosystem, and to reconnect with land and labor, as I have argued in previous ethnographic chapters, they did so in markedly different ways. As I learned more about gardening in the city, and its particular history in Elmwood, I came to suspect that controversies over hoophouses and other urban agriculture related land use policies were in fact rooted in historical processes of class differentiation and inequalities based on differences of race. In this chapter I employ Checker’s (2011) concept of “environmental gentrification” to present just such a reframing of debates about economic development priorities and land use policies in Elmwood.

Scholars of environmental justice have long argued that there is a classed division in environmentalist practice (Brodkin 2009). Beginning with the formal inception of the modern environmentalist movement in the twentieth century,⁷⁶ middle class citizens and elites worked to save pristine “nature”—a location depicted as desirably void of human influence, in part because these groups considered themselves and their ways of life removed from the natural world—while working people and people of color lived in different sorts of relationships to nature (Heynen et al. 2006; Price 1999; Taylor 2016). In particular, environmental justice researchers have paid attention to the ways these latter groups’ relegation to marginal land as the result of discriminatory real estate markets and economic inequalities requires them to regularly confront

⁷⁶ The modern environmentalist movement is popularly understood to have begun with the founding of the Sierra Club by John Muir in 1892, with Rachel Carson’s publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962 also representing an important watershed moment, reinvigorating the movement and kicking off its most recent incarnation (Taylor 2016).

the ways middle class and elite lifestyles are indeed based on a specific, highly exploitative, relationships to nature, evidenced in everything from waste dumps to toxic chemicals leaching into the groundwater (Bullard 1990; McGurty 2009).

In her 2011 work on environmental sustainability initiatives in Harlem, Melissa Checker expands on these understandings of environmental justice and class-based environmental inequalities. Using the concept “environmental gentrification” (211), she presents the paradox faced by low-income residents who desire the environmental benefits these initiatives entail, but are harmed by the social and spatial displacements that follow as middle-class residents begin moving into what becomes a more desirable place to live, one that supports their “green” lifestyles. Based on these observations, Checker defines environmental gentrification as “operat[ing] through a discourse of sustainability which simultaneously describes a vision of ecologically and socially responsible urban planning, a ‘green’ lifestyle which appeals to affluent, eco-conscious residents, and a technocratic, politically neutral approach to solving problems” (212). While these discursive operations were certainly in effect in Elmwood, the process of environmental gentrification in the city differed from that documented by Checker in two significant ways.

First, gentrification in Elmwood did not entail spatial displacement. The real estate market in Elmwood was in fact so comparatively uncompetitive that the city served to house those displaced by gentrification in neighboring locations; in other words, no one was being forced to leave their homes due to rising property values. Rather, another form of displacement occurred as the economic and environmental concerns of working-class people and people of color were frequently left out or given less emphasis in the City’s emerging policy frameworks, which instead focused on the development of a green, creative city.

Second, following scholars of gentrification such as Cahill (2007) and Zukin (2008), I consider the ways environmental gentrification in Elmwood operated through the erasure or representation of the City’s histories of urban agriculture. The types of policy elisions described

above, I argue, are made possible through the ways the historical experiences of working-class people and people of color are ignored in contemporary discourses and policy frameworks. These histories complicate narratives of progressives versus conservatives, and indicate that working-class residents and Elmwoodites of color have their own unique experiences and concerns that simultaneously challenge the purported benefits of a green, creative city and suggest ways to make such imagined futures more socially equitable.

I begin by reviewing the master planning process and the role of urban agriculture in the resulting city-wide plan. I then attend to the ways urban agriculture and related activities contributed to the public controversies that ensued, framed by the primarily white, middle-class participants as a contestation between progressives and conservatives. In order to problematize this binary, I subsequently discuss two different histories of urban agriculture in Elmwood: chicken-keeping in a working-class neighborhood and life in a majority African-American neighborhood prior to urban renewal. Then, through three different takes on gardening aesthetics—permaculture-style “wild” gardens,⁷⁷ manicured landscaping, and blight-fighting—I address the ways class- and race-based inequalities were continuing to be reproduced through particular kinds of gardening practices and land use priorities. In conclusion, I examine the ways these practices and priorities converged with planning and economic development policies to create a kind of environmental gentrification in Elmwood, one that was intimately connected to the emergence of a “green” middle class.

⁷⁷ Permaculture refers to an approach to agricultural, infrastructural, and social design that seeks to mimic ecological systems. Key principles include a prioritization of “closed-loop” systems wherein nothing is wasted and the belief that everything is, directly or indirectly, useful. For example, permaculturalists were fond of saying “nothing is a weed.” When applied to gardening, permaculture principles were typically enacted through a favoring of perennial plants, companion and complementary planting techniques, and an emphasis on composting. In their attempts to mimic nature, permaculture-style gardens regularly featured tall plants, unkempt growing patterns, and the presence of plants often indexed as weeds (e.g. milkweed, Jerusalem artichoke, goldenrod, etc.)

Of Master Plans and Hoophouses

Why was Elmwood writing a new master plan? Master plans are non-legally binding documents that cities use to set policy priorities by integrating the municipalities' economic development strategies, guiding values, and zoning codes into a coherent road map for the future and subsequent implementation plan. In 2013 the City's current master plan dated from the 1990s, and thus could be considered out-of-date. It was, as one planning official explained to me, premised on the idea that Elmwood was a small industrial city; land use designations were primarily concerned with regulating various forms of industrial usage and supporting single-family occupancy homes, while economic development priorities focused on attracting and retaining manufacturing businesses. While some Elmwoodites continued to hope for the return of an industrial based economy, by 2013 most city residents, particularly political and civic leaders, had accepted that deindustrialization was more or less final. It was time, they argued, for the city to move on and not only reimagine what Elmwood as a city could be, but to plan for a postindustrial future.

Thus, the master plan being developed in 2013 (and eventually adopted in October of that year) proposed developing a diversified economy based on four key sectors: small manufacturing and craft production, creative economy,⁷⁸ renewable energy, and food. The new plan also introduced a form-based zoning code, which re-imagined the city as a network of components, defined as centers, neighborhoods, single-use districts, and corridors. Zoning regulation would focus primarily on appearance and building form within each component, with use regulated secondarily by designation within the geographic boundaries of a given component. Together these changes were intended to transform Elmwood from a deindustrial city struggling to remain solvent to a "great place to do business, especially the green and creative kind."

How Elmwood was to go about becoming such a city was an entirely different question.

⁷⁸ This rather vague term is defined in the plan as "advertising, architecture, art, crafts, design, fashion, film, music, performing arts, publishing, research and development, software, toys and games, television and radio, and video games."

The master plan identified three key steps: implement a form-based code; encourage economic development in the small manufacturing and craft production, creative economy, renewable energy, and food sectors; and improve the City’s walkability and alternative transportation options. In proposing these strategies though, divisions in the City, and the fact that not everyone wanted to see Elmwood become a green, creative city, began to emerge. Business and art incubators, aesthetic changes, investment in green infrastructure, and urban agriculture all became points of conflict where different opinions about the future of Elmwood were contested. These contestations were exemplified in the public debates about whether to allow hoophouses to be built in residential zones that emerged in 2013–2014.



Figure 7.1 *Two hoophouses; located on the Sowing Change urban farm.*

The parameters of the hoophouse debate were fairly straightforward. These simple, domed, metal frame and plastic sheeting structures are essential to profitable vegetable farming in northern climates like Michigan (Figure 7.1).⁷⁹ As the master plan brought land use and economic redevelopment policy to the fore, calling for investment in the City's burgeoning food-based economy, those who supported urban agriculture as a form of economic redevelopment argued that hoophouses would be necessary to foster financially viable agricultural ventures in the City. However, as structures that can be dismantled and reassembled, hoophouses were technically temporary and thus existed in a kind of regulatory limbo, as temporary structures are not typically regulated by zoning codes, though strictures on size (which would limit hoophouses to the size of other small outbuildings (10' x 20') in residential areas) were thought to perhaps apply. With a new zoning code being drafted and serious questions about the role of urban agriculture in the City on the table, advocates for hoophouses felt it was time to make a move. While hoophouses could unconditionally be built on industrial properties (or "district zones" in the language of new code), advocates wanted them to be permitted throughout the city, including commercial and residential zones.

If the thought of hoophouses dotting the City fit with the master plan's idea of an entrepreneurial, green, craft based economy, it did not necessarily fit with all residents' ideas of

⁷⁹ Also called passive solar greenhouses or high tunnels, hoophouses trap air, heated by the sun, providing a growing space that is many degrees warmer than the outside air. These structures extend the growing season by a month or more on either end, depending on the crop in question, while a well-trained grower cultivating cold-hardy crops can generate yields year-round. The benefits are two-fold. For agricultural businesses, this greatly increases profit-margins; for small vegetable farms this can make or break their financial viability. Ecologically, the extended growing season increases the capacity of local farms to feed local people, cutting down on the carbon emissions and other environmental externalities associated with industrial-scale agricultural production and shipping. Thus, hoophouses have in recent years become a sort of rallying point for local food movements in northern climates. In the Elmwood area, various fund-raising and farm incubator programs worked to get this otherwise expensive (\$10-15,000 for a full-size, 30' x 96' hoop) technology to beginning farmers, as this capital investment can make or break a new farm. Within Elmwood's city limits the only full-size hoophouses were located on Sowing Change's urban farm. Much smaller, DIY versions can be fashioned out of PVC pipe and plastic sheeting acquired from a hardware store, and in 2014 Sowing Change began selling kits for these mini-hoops and their prevalence increased visibly as a result. A few of the more dedicated backyard gardeners in Elmwood had invested in small hoophouses, about the size of a 10' x 20' backyard shed, in order to more significantly increase their growing capacity and bolster their household self-sufficiency.

what a city should look like and how it should function. Hoophouses are, in many people's (including my own) estimation, quite ugly. The metal-and-plastic structures are designed for function, not aesthetics. On top of being visibly unpleasant, they quite loudly signify a type of land use at odds with mid- to late-twentieth century urban norms, where prosperity and middle-class status were signaled through a tight control of nature and absence of (visible) livelihood-based land uses. Agriculture necessarily disrupts these norms and was thus considered by many to be an entirely inappropriate urban land use. Thus objection to hoophouses centered on not only an aesthetic distaste, but on the idea that hoops were symbols of an activity that threatened the very notions of what a modern, middle-class city was.

Hippies versus Fuddy-duddies

These were the contours of the hoophouse debate as I first encountered them in the fall of 2013, and as Elmwoodites subsequently explained them to me. As one resident explained it to me in a 2014 interview, Elmwood was home to two competing visions for the city's future. In a conversation about the debate over legalizing chicken-keeping that occurred five years prior, they posited that on one end of the continuum were people who sought to radically alter the urban environment in the name of ecological sustainability and economic redevelopment.

These people are often regarded as hippies. Which is fine, I'm a hippy. And there was another group of people that I will refer to as fuddy-duddies. . . who were not into chickens at all. Some people were concerned about the noise. Some people were just concerned about change, those were the fuddy-duddies. Some people were concerned about smell. Some people, and these I would also class with the fuddy-duddies, were also concerned about socioeconomic status and that perception. Like, the people who keep chickens are yokels, I don't want to live next to— I don't want to live in that neighborhood.

These divisions re-emerged, they explained, when debates over the ordinance permitting

honeybees occurred, and were once again front and center during the hoophouse debate. It should be noted that this proposed division was meant to encompass both white and African-American residents of the city. While I will discuss further below the ways attitudes toward urban agriculture among the city's black community emerged from a particular historical context, both white and black Elmwoodites could be found on either side of this hippy/fuddy-duddy divide.⁸⁰

From their perspective, as someone genuinely interested in finding land use policies both sides could agree on, both extremes of this debate were problematic. Supporters of urban agriculture tended to be very single-minded, they said, "they wanted it everywhere. Business districts, urban agriculture. Manufacturing districts, urban agriculture. Fish farms, aquaponics," and the pro-hoophouse faction from the zoning charrettes, "seemed to be wanting hoophouses any time, any place, anywhere, get off my lawn, in a weird way." The other side was equally intractable. "The people who didn't want urban gardens, didn't want it anywhere. They didn't want it in their front yard, they didn't want it in business districts, they didn't want it in manufacturing districts, they didn't want it anywhere." Urban agriculture had become, for better or worse though, a key economic redevelopment strategy for the city, as enshrined in the master plan. While "fuddy-duddy" concerns with aesthetics and maintenance were well-founded, they felt they were also adequately covered by existing regulations on weeds, decayed structures, and so on. However, this resident, like all others with whom I spoke, was also frustrated by urban agriculture supporters' seeming single-issue stance and unwillingness to engage on other issues or permit a degree of regulation curbing agricultural practice.

This divide was impacting the city beyond debates over urban agriculture, too. "The fuddy-duddy camp, it's gotten their hackles up quite a bit more. So they're more sensitive to things that aren't just food related. Affordable housing, things like that." In their estimation,

⁸⁰ Both these terms (hippy and fuddy-duddy) were meant to be derogatory, what one side derisively might call the other. I use them here with reference to their indigenous meanings, as I believe they accurately capture the attitudes among Elmwoodites. The terms are not meant as complements, reflecting the frustration each side felt with the other, but are not particularly vicious, reflecting the by and large polite and civil tone of the debate.

younger people were being attracted to the city by its progressive policies, governing everything from LGBT rights to urban agriculture, a demographic change that further angered the old guard. This sense that the conflicts over urban agriculture had a generational component was echoed by a leading figure among Elmwoodites' urban agriculture supporters, and a vocal advocate for local food-based economic redevelopment.

We still have so much to do to change perceptions about what's appropriate, old versus new guard. I really think a lot of stuff in this city really are [*sic*] a generational clash. I think that's happening a lot right now. The old economy versus the new economy. Old perceptions of what's of value in a community and what creates value, and new perceptions. And it's really hard when no one knows what that could look like, with no example to make a policy proactively.

In this discursive construction, youth and new economic ideas, like urban agriculture, struggled for space among aging residents, outdated land use policies, and the remains of an old, industrial economy. This stance was characteristic of supporters of urban agriculture in the city. Elmwood was perceived to be at a turning point, with the opportunity to grow in new ways and become a different sort of place, one characterized by small-scale, food-based, entrepreneurial, craft production. A green, creative city. Standing in the way were the city's conservatives, who held on to a belief that the good old days would come back and thus remained hostile to any dramatic change that might jeopardize such a return. The city's core political conflict was thus repeatedly posed in various ways as one between the hippies versus the fuddy-duddies.

Histories of Urban Agriculture

Working-class Chickens

This discourse of hippies versus fuddy-duddies framed the ways city officials, urban agriculture advocates, many white, middle-class residents with whom I spoke, and myself (initially) understood the conflicts that arose over the role of urban agriculture in the City's land use policy

and economic redevelopment priorities.⁸¹ Urban agricultural activities, however, have long histories in American cities. While many contemporary, primarily white and middle-class, Elmwoodites supported alternative agrifood practices like urban vegetable gardening and chicken-raising out of a sincere belief in their ecological and economic benefit to the city, other residents had their own historic and contemporary relationships to gardens and livestock. And in the case of chickens, the question of their benefits and appropriateness remained unsettled for many Elmwoodites.

Small, efficient, highly-productive, and, in small numbers, not particularly odiferous, chickens are well adapted to live among humans in low-density urban settings. While there is little information on chicken-keeping in Elmwood prior to World War II, scattered newspaper articles mentioning competitions among chicken-fanciers and the memories of the City's elder residents both indicate that these birds did in fact make their home in the city. Chickens really began to garner attention though, with the influx of Southern migrants during the mid-twentieth century. As these folks journeyed north they brought with them ways of life that included subsistence gardening and livestock raising.

In September 2014 I spoke with a middle-aged white woman named Janet, born in the 1950s and raised in the wartime and post-war housing subdivisions of northeastern Elmwood Township. "As long as I can remember my family, and everyone we knew, had a large garden, even tucked away in places you'd never think a garden could go. . . We had chickens my entire life [*sic*] and I didn't even know there was an ordinance against it. Lots of our neighbors had them too." Janet's was not the only reference to chicken-keeping that cropped up in my interviews with older, working-class residents of Elmwood. Ms. Dolores and several other elders in the city's African-American neighborhoods also spoke about keeping chickens as children. As

⁸¹ I did not have the opportunity to speak with many non-gardeners, and those with whom I did confer were almost always supporters of extensive urban gardening and beekeeping. Thus my analysis here is concerned with the ways urban agriculturalists, their supporters, and city officials engaged with the debate over land use policy. Further research is needed to explore the ways those who opposed urban agriculture understood the conflict.

far as I can tell from these scattered references, and with corroboration from the local historians with whom I spoke, urban chickens were not an uncommon thing in mid-twentieth century Elmwood's working class neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color.

Janet is the daughter of a white West Virginia coalminer, recruited north after the war to work in one of the local automotive plants. According to Janet, he was reluctant to leave, but her mother, tired of living in coal camps, urged him to come up. When they first arrived in the area, before Janet was born, they lived in Detroit and her mom, who had never left the hollers, was completely overwhelmed. "She said she would go for days without leaving the house. She'd never heard other languages or seen people of color. She said it was just like that book, *The Dollmaker*."⁸²

By the time Janet was born the family had moved to Elmwood, where they lived in what had been housing for wartime workers. Built by the government to accommodate the sudden increase in population required to meet World War II production demands, this housing was meant to be temporary, but ten years after the war it remained occupied. Looking at old family photos from the time, Janet joked the one-story row houses looked like chicken coops. Due in part to US federal policies encouraging the construction of suburban housing developments, such as VA-backed loans for (white) veterans and the construction of the interstate system, subdivisions began to be constructed to the north and east of Elmwood City. "People," including Janet's own family, "moved into there so fast the houses weren't even finished. I know people who did well for themselves finishing drywall and sanding floors." Eventually the temporary housing was demolished and Elmwood's working class suburbs, like Orchard Park and Tremont, reached their current dimensions.

⁸² This 1954 novel by Harriette Arnow tells the story of a woman and her family who migrate from rural Kentucky to Detroit during the wartime labor shortage. The protagonist and her children struggle to make a home for themselves in temporary housing, adapt to life in an industrial city, and manage the discrimination facing Appalachian newcomers. This bleak work of fiction was referenced by several Elmwoodites as an all too accurate depiction of life for the City's migrant and working-class residents in the mid-twentieth century.

Though she had never experienced or witnessed it herself, Janet often heard stories about the discrimination Southerners (her term) faced. “They wouldn’t be allowed in certain places, or run out of stores and bars. It was hard for them to get credit at places like furniture stores. People referred to them as ‘those people.’” This attitude kept “Southerners” confined to the new northeastern suburbs, which ended up comparatively class and race diverse places. Temporary wartime housing had not been racially segregated, and this carried over into the new suburbs. Janet recalled the class and race diversity with which she grew up. “We lived next door to a doctor and a black woman. You had to because there was nowhere to live and you learned to get along and change your views.” As biases against southern migrants waned and the next generation integrated into the working-class industrial city Elmwood had become, these suburbs became less diverse. At the time of my research places like Tremont and Orchard Park were predominantly working to working-middle-class neighborhoods, and were racially marked as well—Orchard Park was predominantly white, Tremont African-American.

This gradual lessening in discriminatory attitudes toward Southerners, and the class mobility of these families as they acquired suburban homes and entered the working-middle-class, also resulted in changes in land use practices. If chickens were once common throughout these neighborhoods, they were no longer so. “Nowadays,” Janet muses, “the older generation, and my own generation even, are against chickens. They don’t see it as appropriate even though they had them. But the younger generations want them and don’t see what the problem is.” I responded that others had mentioned such a generational divide, and pressed her to tell me more about why peoples’ attitudes had changed. She concurred with the story I had been piecing together over the past year: keeping chickens was something you did because you were poor, but now that folks were better off the chickens ought to go. “There was a sense for some,” she said, “that a manicured lawn meant you had arrived” (see Jackson 1985).

Just as (white) Southern migrants, helped along by well-paying factory jobs and single-family homes in the suburbs, eventually ceased to be a marked category in Elmwood’s emerging

working-class population, so too did chickens gradually fade from the landscape, though they were helped along by the passage of zoning ordinances, targeted at the stigmatized Southerners, outlawing livestock in urban areas. Chickens, of course, are not hoopouses, and Southern migrants did not bring these plastic domed buildings with them. However, the rise and fall, and rise again, of Elmwood's chickens tell us something about the nexus of urban agricultural practice and class in Elmwood. The historical trajectory of chicken-keeping in mid-twentieth century Elmwood follows lines of class mobility. Whatever they might have meant before, with the influx of Southern migrants to the City, chickens came to symbolize these disregarded newcomers. To keep chickens then, was to identify oneself with a populace who relied on these birds for their subsistence. In contrast, a grass lawn free of poultry (and vegetables) telegraphed the occupants' ability to dispense with such practices. Hoopouses are similarly legible symbols of subsistence activity, visible marks in the urban landscape denoting agricultural practice. The history of chickens in working-class Elmwood thus suggests that opposition to hoopouses, like opposition to the revival of chickens that preceded it, may be in part informed by histories of class stigma and mobility. For those residents who can claim such histories, urban agricultural practices are "marked" in ways that reference painful narratives of discrimination and adaptation. In other words, the story of opposition to hoopouses, and to urban agriculture writ large, is in part a story of class mobility.

“ . . . before they urban renewed it . . . ”

Working-class white residents' historic experiences of urban agriculture were not alone in shaping the contours of Elmwood's contemporary land use policy debates. The city's African-American community had its own history of urban gardening and livestock raising. From its founding in the 1830s through the Civil War, Elmwood was known as a racially diverse and tolerant city. Black Elmwoodites resided and owned businesses throughout the city, but this changed following the Civil War as reactionary responses among whites to Emancipation,

resulted in *de facto* segregation by the early 20th century. In response, the black community consolidated in the Williams-Bell neighborhood, where the majority of their members and institutions were located, including schools, churches, civic organizations, and a bustling business district on Williams Street. Nevertheless, Elmwood's black community continued to thrive, and grew in size throughout the first half of the twentieth century as the Great Migration brought African-Americans from the rural American South to northern industrial cities like Elmwood. This influx changed Williams-Bell as residents became increasingly likely to be members of the industrial working class, and through UAW membership gained a degree of political power in the city, including the mayoralty in 1967.

While current political districting ensures Williams-Bell and African-Americans remain represented on Elmwood's City Council, the political strength of this neighborhood has mostly dissipated. So too has the neighborhood's thriving business district and civic organizations. Walking west down Williams Street, the main corridor for the Williams-Bell neighborhood, in 2014, the effects of the 1965–1974⁸³ demolition of the street's business district are apparent. Accomplished under the auspices of “urban renewal,”⁸⁴ this project razed the business district and surrounding blocks of homes, and left in its wake a tangle of interstate ramps, one-way multi-lane

⁸³ Urban renewal began in Elmwood in 1962, with the passage of a plan that would demolish over 100 acres of “slum” and “blight” in the Williams-Bell neighborhood. This plan was met with vociferous and prolonged protest from the community, and thus while demolition began in 1965, it was not complete until 1974. Furthermore, allegations of corruption and racial bias brought the urban renewal project to a federally-mandated halt in 1966. A much smaller “urban redevelopment” project, focusing on 11 acres surrounding the area where demolition had begun, was subsequently adopted. A public housing project was constructed in 1971, and the remainder of the cleared acreage remained vacant until the mid-1990s, when a strip mall and manufacturing facility (now a distribution center) were constructed. Displaced residents complained of inadequate compensation for the loss of their homes and were unable to get loans to purchase new homes due to racial discrimination (redlining) from local banks; many left the area to settle in nearby majority-black cities, including Detroit.

⁸⁴ The term “urban renewal” refers to an urban planning and development trend in the mid-twentieth century (spurred on by the federal Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954) whereby areas within urban centers designated “slums” or “blighted” were cleared and the land turned over to private developers. The stated intention was to replace substandard housing with new, high-quality homes. In effect, urban renewal projects targeted poor and majority African-American neighborhoods, whose decrepit housing and decaying infrastructure were the result of economic inequality and racial discrimination. These populations were effectively displaced from urban centers and the land sold to private developers who generated a tidy profit turning the land into middle-class housing, highways, shopping centers, and other high-profile, high-profit land uses (Gregory 1998; Kleniewski 1984; Massey and Denton 1993; Sugrue 1996; Thomas 1997)

feeder streets, few businesses, and little street life. Of course, the economic impacts of deindustrialization, loss of neighborhood political power tied to the decline of the UAW, and the ongoing institutional racism of US housing and welfare policies all contributed to the current state of Williams-Bell. However, the oral histories of Williams-Bell elders collected by the dedicated public historian Alfred, make clear that Williams Street was thriving right up until it was “urban renewed,” as one elder put it, and that the loss of this business district irrevocably damaged the Williams-Bell neighborhood.

When I met Alfred in 2014 he was working on recording oral histories and other documentary evidence about Williams Street. I asked whether, at any point in his research, he had heard stories about urban vegetable gardening and livestock raising. He replied that he was under the impression it was quite common, and invited me to his next history gathering meeting so I could meet some of Williams-Bell’s elders and ask a few questions. Thus, in July I found myself driving out of town to the nearby religious Center to attend a gathering of six African-American elders who had grown up Williams-Bell during the 1950–1960s.

We all gathered around a table in the basement of the Center, and Alfred explained the project he was working on, trying to use oral histories, personal documents, and old tax records to recreate what Williams Street must have been like before urban renewal. As he explained that no record of the neighborhood and business district existed at the Historical Society one woman spoke up. “Where were we?” she asked rhetorically, before answering, “We didn’t exist.” With this the elders began to reminisce about what was their undeniable existence, and excitement grew as they told their stories and wandered down tangents prompted by shared memories. They described a neighborhood with multiple grocery stores, pool halls, bars, restaurants, cleaners, and a record shop. There were regularly dances and both BB King and Smokey Robinson played at a local club. They also recalled what one man called “quiet segregation,” and their youthful rebellion, running through a neighboring white subdivision whose streets did not connect with those of the Williams-Bell neighborhood, ringing doorbells. “They couldn’t keep us kids out,”

laughed one woman.

Throughout their stories the elders gathered that day made passing mentions of things like vegetable gardens and chickens. For example, they recalled one store where you could sell your excess eggs and chicken meat, and others could buy it. Chickens were, in fact, a particularly vivid memory for one woman. At the beginning of our meeting, when I introduced myself and explained my interests, one man recalled “everybody had greens and tomatoes in the backyard.” “Oh yes,” the woman added, as though there were nothing remarkable about the fact, “and chickens too. I remember snapping their necks and hanging them on the line.” Laughter ensued as others remembered participating in or witnessing the less-than-pleasant work of chicken processing. Later in the afternoon, as I asked more specific questions about gardening, they recounted a long list of crops that were common, as well as recalling neighbors with grape arbors, goats, and pigs. When I asked what happened to any surplus, all agreed that it was preserved or shared. “No one went hungry,” one man commented, and everyone nodded in agreement. The subject of pigs prompted one elder to recall the barbecue his grandmother sold out of her yard, profiting from the neighborhood’s livestock. “But the City put a stop to it eventually,” another elder quipped, referring to the keeping of livestock. No one knew exactly when, or why, but most recalled that sometime during the 1960s city officials came around and said you could no longer keep livestock.⁸⁵

As the afternoon wore on and the elders became tired, Alfred wrapped up the session and we all said our goodbyes. Back home in Elmwood, as I typed up my notes and reflected on the meeting, I began to laugh bitterly. Here, in the “slums” of Elmwood had been the kind of thriving local food economy that current-day advocates of urban agriculture were trying to recreate. Yet

⁸⁵ It is unclear exactly when (or why) livestock were formally banned from the city, and even whether this occurred through the passage of one ordinance or over the course of several years. The decision was explained to me by one city official (firmly against urban agriculture) that the decision was because animals were unhygienic and did not belong in the city. As with my previous analysis of chicken-keeping and working-class neighborhoods, I suspect that the decision was also motivated by a desire to eradicate activities associated with stigmatized groups, like working class people and people of color.

this story was strikingly absent from any narratives about urban agriculture and its future in the city. I had only found it in the memories of these African-American elders. The omission was not, however, a surprising one. Advocates for local food economies—that is, the production, processing, and consumption of food within a circumscribed community—including supporters of urban agriculture, frequently refer to historical examples, but these examples are predominantly white and rural (Allen 2004; Lyson 2004). They are, to my knowledge, never both urban and black (see Moore 2006; Zeiderman 2006).⁸⁶ However, the elders participating in the oral history project spoke about their former gardens and chicken coops with the nostalgia of those remembering a community long gone, not with any particular sense of longing for the return of these activities, or commentary on their re-emergence in the city. They, like other residents of Williams-Bell with whom I spoke at various community meetings and in interviews, expressed a sense of ambivalence about the resurgence of urban agriculture in the city.

When considered through an historical lens, this ambivalence or resistance to contemporary urban agricultural practices in Elmwood on the part of working people and people of color appears more nuanced than the popular characterization of fuddy-duddy conservatism would suggest. From the mid-twentieth century on, urban agricultural practices were used in Elmwood (as elsewhere in the US) to mark specific populations in classed and racialized ways—those people from rural and/or Southern places, too poor or ignorant or black to know how to live properly in the city. This stigmatization resulted in both a move away from these activities by marked households and changes in city zoning policy outlawing particular urban agricultural

⁸⁶ It is important not to romanticize the local food economy of Williams-Bell. Like the black neighborhoods Boyd (2008) discusses, where nostalgia for close-knit communities, thriving civil society, and black-owned businesses led some to overlook the violent political repression and segregation that necessitated, we must keep in mind that this economy was one borne of necessity in a segregated city among a socioeconomically oppressed community. Nevertheless, it is a history worth remembering. Like the Williams Street business district that was destroyed in the process of urban renewal, the histories of urban farming among Elmwood's black community, and urban black communities nationwide, are all too often overlooked, through omission functionally erased from official records. Recovering these histories, engaging residents in conversations about their neighborhoods' past and referencing it in official documents and discourses, is one possible step toward greater inclusion of African-American residents in the city planning and development processes, and I would strongly encourage such action.

practices, particularly livestock raising.

This historical analysis thus indicates two key issues that the resurgence of interest in urban agriculture, concentrated among a certain white, middle-class portion of the population, overlooked. First, the ways activities like vegetable gardening and livestock raising were used to mark and legitimize class and racial difference. Second, how such processes of class formation and racialization were used to justify the implementation of formal land use policies and informal aesthetic norms in Elmwood that severely curtailed the practice of urban agriculture. While I do not have data from a wide-range of working class residents and residents of color in Elmwood with which to make assertive claims, what these two historical narratives suggest is that for these residents there were other lenses through which the contemporary debates about hoophouses and related land uses might be viewed, ones closely related to historical experiences of class and race based inequality, zoning policy, and economic development practices.

Furthermore, these histories, and their absence from contemporary conversations about urban agriculture among supporters, have had very particular consequences for contemporary processes of class, and race, formation in Elmwood. In the second half of this chapter I thus turn to an investigation of the intersections between current-day land use aesthetics and policies, gardening practices, and processes of class formation. Using examples from a range of race and class based experiences, I consider how these contemporary intersections were understood from the perspective of the City's white, middle-class gardeners and how a more historically grounded analysis might provide greater nuance to interpretations of debates over land use policies and economic development priorities—as well as the raced and classed dimensions of urban gardening and livestock raising in Elmwood.

Garden Aesthetics

Permaculture-style, “Wild” Gardens

As the examples of the Hilltop Community Garden (Chapter 4), Lara (Chapter 5), and Anna

(Chapter 6) have all suggested, gardeners' class status, particularly as reflected through their neighborhood of residence, shaped the ways they gardened and established caring priorities. While I have argued that white, middle-class gardeners in affluent neighborhoods like Hilltop had more leeway with which to care for ecosystems and practice eco-conscious, "wild"-style gardening, they did not in fact experience a sense of *carte blanche* to garden as they wished. Rather, they frequently contended with the aesthetic expectations of their neighbors, which were very much formed in relation to suburban land use norms. This conflict was evident in the conversation that emerged after a gathering to discuss prospective permaculture-inspired projects for a large median in Maplewood, one of Elmwood's most white and affluent neighborhoods.

Leslie, the organizer of the gathering began talking with her neighbor as the meeting's participants began returning to their homes. Both lived across the street from the median and had together undertaken a permaculture-based landscaping project to jointly manage the drainage problem at the boundary between their properties. This led to a discussion of Leslie's *hugelkultur*⁸⁷ project and, as it so often did when permaculturalists began talking about their various projects, the issue of aesthetics. *Hugelkultur* mounds are not particularly pretty (being essentially a pile of sticks and leaves until well-established), and Leslie struggled with ways to respond to her neighbors' concerns about the mounds' appearance. Upon hearing talk of aesthetics and neighborly ire, a friend of Leslie's and fellow Maplewood resident, jumped into the conversation. She wanted to stop mowing her lawn, but worried about the trouble she could get in for violating zoning ordinance.⁸⁸ Various strategies were discussed, including seeding the lawn with clover (which grows at a lower height than grass) or mowing just a strip along the curb so

⁸⁷ *Hugelkultur* refers to a cultivation method intended to mimic the process of decay occurring on forest floors. Dried logs, leaves, and other compostable biomass are assembled into a pile, and then covered with a layer of topsoil. Cultivars are planted in the topsoil layer, and as the underlying mass decays it releases heat, nutrients, and moisture to the plants.

⁸⁸ Like most cities, Elmwood has zoning regulations governing how high grass can grow before being considered a nuisance. However, Elmwood has complaint-based zoning code enforcement. Citations are only issued if a neighbor officially registers a complaint with the City. Thus, residents have a degree of freedom with regard to land use regulations if their neighbors are amenable.

that people knew the space was cared for. All expressed their admiration for Anna, over in Hilltop, with her six-foot tall pollinator-friendly yard (discussed in Chapter 5). How, they wondered, had she managed to keep such a yard for so many years without inciting complaint?

Having spent much time with Anna over the past year and talked to her extensively about her yard, I knew that it was possible through a concerted campaign of outreach to her neighbors. Anna had lived on Tecumseh Street for decades, and as her gardens got more extensive, and taller, she maintained conversations with her neighbors, explaining why she was doing what she was doing. Her explanations focused on the environmental problems that her yard helped solve, such as reducing the CO₂ emissions, and the benefits of healthy pollinator populations and locally produced food for everyone. She also readily shared the bounty of her garden, including vegetables, herbal remedies, honey, and her wife's beer, wine, and mead. Her campaign of good will worked; in all the years she lived on Tecumseh Street, the only complaint Anna received was about the honeybees—the complaint that incited her successful campaign to legalize beekeeping in Elmwood.

The conversation among Maplewood permaculturalists and Anna's long-running efforts to maintain the support of her neighbors both speak to the tensions certain vegetable gardeners and beekeepers found themselves negotiating. Leslie, Anna, and other like-minded gardeners were committed to making their urban environments places that nurtured a multitude of species, and to that end cultivated permaculture-style gardens, pollinator habitat, and honeybee hives. Cities, however, are also human habitats, and these eco-conscious gardeners had to find ways to live well with people, many of whom did not share their ideas about making the city a habitat for nonhuman beings. Thus, these gardeners found themselves frequently considering how their land use practices impacted others, particularly in terms how they looked to their neighbors and passersby on the street. These moments of consideration were frequently sources of frustration though, a tone that emerged that day in Maplewood. Deeply committed to caring for their ecosystems, these gardeners felt that accommodating their neighbors' aesthetic preferences

compromised their ability to tend to the needs of nonhuman species. One young man, a front-yard gardener in an historic district, expressed his consternation in an interview. Citing the fuel inefficiencies and polluting exhaust of two-stroke lawn-mower engines, he said “burning fossil fuel in such a dirty way just to mow grass for other people who want it to look that way— it seems nuts!” He, like many of the other eco-conscious gardeners I spoke with, struggled to understand why other residents were not willing to sacrifice a degree of appearance for the good of the planet.

There were undoubtedly many reasons why most Elmwoodites did not favor “wild gardens” in their yards or in their neighborhoods, ranging from a disbelief in anthropogenic climate change to a lack of knowledge about the ecological impacts of grass lawns to a general disinterest in landscaping. Among gardeners, however, resistance to permaculture-style, eco-conscious gardening practices was much less ambiguous. It was firmly rooted in class-based anxieties over the appearance of these gardens as overgrown and unkempt.

“ . . . a more manicured look ”

Sherri, a white, middle-aged woman living in Orchard Park exemplified these anxieties. A backyard gardener and member of the Orchard Park Yard and Garden Club (OPYGC), Sherri frequently mentioned the importance of gardens’ visual appearance during our interactions. Sitting down for an interview in the fall of 2014, I asked why the aesthetics of gardening were so important to her. Sherri, as it turned out, grew up on a farm outside of Elmwood. Money was tight and everyone in the family worked hard to grow food; little time or effort was expended making the house and yard look tidy. “I was embarrassed,” Sherri said. “there was stuff always lying out and about in the house, the yard wasn’t manicured.” As soon as she married and moved to a home of her own Sherri devoted considerable energy to making things “nice and neat, so it looked taken care of.” Further changes in her life circumstances brought her to Orchard Park, and though the neighborhood has struggled with the impacts of deindustrialization and the 2008 housing market

collapse, Sherri is committed to improving the neighborhood. Through her involvement in the OPYGC she hopes to instill in her neighbors a

desire for a better image. . . Even if you can't afford new siding, a couple of plants are affordable and go a long way. So if people looking to buy a house come into the neighborhood and see people trying to step it up a notch, it might bring in a nicer class of people, instead of just super-poor people who park dumpy cars, let kids run around and scream, with their toys everywhere.

By a "couple of plants" Sherri most decidedly does not mean six-foot tall clumps of native species. She believes vegetable gardens should be (with possible exceptions) located in backyards, lawns should be manicured, and front yards should be landscaped with shrubs and flowers.

Sherri's convictions regarding the aesthetics of yards and gardens were shared by numerous gardeners I spoke with, and are rooted in normative suburban land use practices and anxieties about urban disorder. American suburbs, since their beginnings in the nineteenth century, have been constructed, socially and spatially, as enclaves for white, middle class city-dwellers seeking to escape the ethnic and class diversity of American cities (Jackson 1985). As such, suburban dwelling has played an important role in the ways these residents communicate class and racial status, for example, by creating yards that are devoid of livelihood activity, their "neat" and minimal landscaping signaling a kind of pastoral leisure and moral rectitude (Hayden 2004; Heiman 2015).

Consequently, the aesthetics of yards, whether tidy landscaping or overgrown weeds, are intimately bound up in the processes of class mobility and distinction that characterize middle class life in the United States, and the experiences of working class laborers in industrial regions like southeast Michigan in particular. In other words, Sherri's experience of class mobility, from rural poverty to urban middle class, instilled in her very specific concerns about environmental aesthetics. Through her "neat" yard she was able to communicate herself as a member of the suburban middle class and by helping maintain the aesthetic standards of her neighbors' yards she

protected that status. She was by no means categorically opposed to front yard gardens, commenting positively on fellow OPYGC members Bill and Jane's frequently weeded front-yard vegetable garden bordered with flowers, or environmentalist concerns, lamenting the growth of urban sprawl and its resulting loss of green space and rural farm land. She was, however, not willing to pursue those things to the detriment of aesthetic-based class standards. Permaculture-style and other wild gardens, with their evocations of disorder and declining class status, are thus perceived as threats by Sherri and city-dwellers with similar experiences and attitudes.

Fight Blight!

Processes of class formation via suburban land use aesthetics cannot be understood outside of the concerns over urban disorder, or to use the language of Elmwoodites, "blight," to which they are opposed. The language of blight—which generically refers to convergences of dilapidated buildings, overgrown plant life, and crumbling infrastructure—continues to be used in popular and planning discourses, in Elmwood and throughout the US, to describe poor or people of color majority neighborhoods and in ways that reference the built environment without also contextualizing these forms with respect to processes of race- and class-based discrimination which, for example, deny residents the means to adequately maintain their homes (Gregory 1998). As a result, middle class and upwardly mobile white city-dwellers could use desires for a better quality of life, away from blight, to justify moves to suburbia that also served to shore up their racial and class status (Hartigan 1999). Such de-racialized and de-classed discourses, focused instead on improving urban life through changes in the built environment, now also serve to justify processes of gentrification (Smith 2002, Zukin 2009).⁸⁹

⁸⁹ The concept of blight must be understood in relation to the history of urban planning and development in the United States during the twentieth century. The term came to prominence in urban studies and planning literature in the 1950s, used to describe dilapidated homes and crumbling infrastructure in need of repair or replacement. Significantly, the discourse of blight emerged at the same time as US planners and city governments began undertaking large-scale infrastructural projects, such as the construction of highways through cities. Echoing the language of hygiene used in the previous century to justify slum-raiding,

Within Elmwood, the term blight was frequently used to reference a particular formation of the built environment: a house with boarded up doors and windows, the yard overgrown with grass several feet high, and various forms of waste—from trash bags to broken down cars—accumulating on the lot. This type of blight, derived as it was from the city’s history of deindustrialization, thus resonated across differences of race, class, and neighborhood residence, representing widespread concerns about Elmwood’s social and economic future. It also represented a kind of existential threat to the city’s home-owners, a group that because of the prosperity made possible through the high-wage industrial labor of previous decades included working class residents and residents of color, as property values are determined in part by the values of surrounding homes and presence of various amenities (Logan and Molotch 2007). In this context, blight was used to visually index declining property values and consequently, downward class mobility.

Despite widespread concerns about blight, its presence was not actually spread equally across the urban landscape. Processes of industrialization and deindustrialization, in combination with systems of racial and regional hierarchy, have rendered working class people and people of color the most socioeconomically precarious and concentrated them in specific neighborhoods within Elmwood. As a result, the location of blight (in the form of vacant houses and properties) is closely tied to communities’ racial identifications and class status. Working class neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color are understood to be both places with high concentrations of blight and communities defined by blight’s presence. Thus, while middle-class neighborhoods fought to keep blight out, working class and majority African-American

government officials and concerned private-sector parties argued that blight was best dealt with through removal, replaced with modern infrastructure and housing (Jacobs 1961; Hall 2002; Logan and Molotch 2007; Thomas 1997). The discourse of blight was notably stripped of references to racial and class differences, and thus elided the fact that decaying neighborhoods resulted from discriminatory public policies and exploitative labor relations that denied poor people and people of color the resources necessary to maintain their communities or justified landlords’ decisions to deny these residents adequate services (Gregory 1998). While large-scale urban renewal projects fell out of fashion by the 1970s, the language of blight is still used to visually index neighborhoods with low property values as justification for gentrification (Smith 2002; Zukin 2009).

neighborhoods, like Williams-Bell, struggled to reduce the occurrence of blight, both groups motivated by the concern that blight tracked troubling declines in class status.

Concerns about blight shed further light on attitudes toward urban gardening and livestock raising among Elmwood's working-class residents and residents of color. Not only were these activities historically stigmatized due to their associations with these marginalized groups, but certain contemporary forms, such as permaculture-style "wild" gardens, visually resembled highly problematic blight. Furthermore, the actual presence of blight in working-class neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color rendered certain urban gardening and livestock raising practices all the more distasteful and at best tangential to the interests of residents. Rather than imagining how their neighborhoods might fit within a future green, creative city—an imagining that did not reflect these neighborhoods' historical experiences or contemporary interests—residents in neighborhoods like Williams-Bell were focused on what were perceived to be more immanent concerns.

For example, in September 2014 I sat down to interview Mr. V. Washington, in his small and very tidy home in Williams-Bell. Mr. Washington lives near the cooperative orchard that Anna helped manage, and gardened on a 10' x 40' section of that land. He moved to Elmwood from Mississippi as young man to work in the construction industry, and has gardened his whole life, learning from his parents who were sharecroppers. Over sixty years old now, Mr. Washington was retired and continued to garden, primarily for health reasons. "I like doing this. It's a lot of exercise. And the stuff you raise yourself, my stuff, it doesn't have no chemicals on it, no fertilizer, nothing like that." He also thought that gardening, particularly in vacant lots like the cooperative orchard, was of benefit to the neighborhood. If more people gardened like he did, Mr. Washington said, "that will help keep the neighborhood up, keep it from going so wild, growing up so high."

Neighborhood maintenance was a primary concern of Mr. Washington and he was part of a group that kept tabs on things, "[we] see where there are holes in streets, vines hanging across

the street, that stuff. We take it to the city and the city comes and cleans it up.” Or ideally does so. A month later at the Williams-Bell Neighborhood Association monthly meeting I listened as the dozen or so gathered residents voiced their concerns. Neighborhood association meetings are typically a time to air grievances, and attendees’ comments should not be considered representative of daily life in the neighborhood. Nevertheless, key themes from this and other meetings emerged. Aside from a continual concern with crime, residents of Williams-Bell were primarily concerned with blight and the routine maintenance of their urban environment. The lots of vacant homes were overgrown and people from outside the neighborhood were using them as impromptu dumping grounds. Roads continued to go unrepaired and gutters backed up. Several residents demanded to know why the street sweepers seen in other parts of the city had not been to Williams-Bell yet. It’s been nearly a year, one man reported. With winter fast approaching it was imperative to get gutters and storm drains cleared. I took away from this meeting, along with my conversations with Mr. Washington and other Williams-Bell residents, an understanding that these environments were indeed in need of transformation, but not necessarily into the setting for creative class residents’ green, entrepreneurial projects. Rather, they needed the kinds of mundane investments of services, like street-sweeping and trash removal, that serve to reproduce urban environments where residents can pursue the basic work of living unencumbered by concerns of spring flooding or growing mounds of waste.

What these outpourings of frustration about the lack of care for public and private urban environments also reiterated for me was that the people of Elmwood’s Williams-Bell neighborhood were not “urban renewed” away. Their business district was razed and their livestock evicted, but they continued to inhabit and make lives for themselves in the neighborhood’s remaining residential areas. As important as it is to document the absence of African-American’s urban agricultural practices from Elmwood’s history and the demolition of their business district, the language of erasure is deeply problematic, particularly in the context of communities of color and Rust Belt cities. This language is all too often used to remove people

from the narrative and thus open up a kind of empty terrain reclaimable for the purposes of redevelopment and gentrification (Safransky 2014). However, the people of Williams-Bell did not disappear with urban renewal; their community remained and continued to have real concerns about the well-being of their neighborhood. While urban agriculture had once been a part of Williams-Bell and could reasonably become part once again, this was not a primary issue for anyone I spoke with, either for or against. Williams-Bell residents' concerns for the future were of a different sort. Less pressing was re-writing the zoning code; more important was the enforcement of *any* zoning code. Green, sustainable cities were nice things, but residents were more concerned about getting their storm drains cleared and their potholes filled.⁹⁰

The experiences of Sherri and the Orchard Park gardeners, and Mr. Washington and the Williams-Bell Neighborhood Association, both demonstrate that ideas about gardening aesthetics intersect with varying experiences of class- and race-based precarity in particular ways. Through the associations of suburban land use aesthetics with middle-class status and blight with downward class mobility, particular kinds of gardening were read by differently situated Elmwoodites in specific ways. These interpretations were directly informed by their personal experiences of inequalities based on differences of class and race, and the ways historic processes of racial discrimination and class formation had shaped the neighborhoods and communities in which they lived.

These examples also demonstrate how processes of class identity formation via gardening

⁹⁰ This is not to imply that black Elmwoodites were intentionally left out of the planning process. All three of the city officials with whom I spoke about the master planning process commented on the lack of representation of Elmwood's black community in the input process and the drafted documents. As such they worried the master plan and its economic redevelopment and land use priorities did not adequately reflect the concerns of black residents, but were at a loss as to how to better reach out and include the city's majority African-American neighborhoods in the public input process, speculating as to why various outreach methods and charrette formats had failed to engage this portion of the City's population. I was unable to shed any further light on why participation was so low among black Elmwoodites. While those with whom I spoke mentioned a lack of knowledge or interest, and scheduling conflict, I suspect that a degree of indifference was also fostered by the extent to which creating a new master plan and zoning code seemed peripheral to the more immediate needs of these neighborhoods, and the extremely negative relationship that neighborhood historically had to urban redevelopment projects.

are ongoing in Elmwood, but in ways far more complex than a simple opposition between working-class gardeners who wanted things “neat” and middle-class gardeners more concerned about being “green.” For there were plenty of middle-class gardeners in Elmwood who valued suburban land use aesthetics; I know of two who went so far as to purchase the neighboring home in order to bolster their property values by ensuring a certain level of upkeep and appearance. And while some individual gardeners did have fairly secure class positions, that was certainly not the case for all eco-conscious gardeners. Likewise, Elmwood’s downward class mobility as a city seemingly pervaded everyone’s concerns about future social and economic security, if not for themselves, then for their communities. Rather the eco-conscious gardeners and their “wild” gardens represented the emergence of a different kind of class-based relationality to urban land use and zoning policy, one I characterize as “green” middle class.

Environmental Gentrification in Elmwood

Environmentalist Priorities and Public Policy

Sherri’s preferences for manicured lawns and gardens, and Mr. Washington’s belief that well-maintained gardens can reduce blight and improve neighborhood upkeep, when stood in contrast to emerging preferences for more “wild” and ecologically sustainable gardens among some residents, evoke the trajectory of urban chickens within Elmwood. Through a combination of social pressure and zoning ordinances, these birds were evicted from the city, but their working-class keepers were active participants in this process as well, considering the transition from chicken-keeping to grass lawns a part of their upward class mobility. Similarly, Sherri and Mr. Washington, through the aesthetics of their gardening practices, take an active role in shoring up the status of themselves and their neighborhood by adhering to well-established land use standards. These efforts are confounded when confronted with the recent re-emergence of chicken-keeping in the city and the growth of “wild,” permaculture-style gardens, exemplified when one African-American elder from Williams-Bell shook his head remarking, “first chickens

were fine, then the city said get rid of ‘em, so we did. And that was fine, but now people are bringing ‘em back and the city says okay.” The expression on his face communicated both bemusement and confusion over the whole affair.

My own version of this elder’s commentary, one implied though not explicit in his narrative, would include an attention to *who* was bringing back chickens. It was not people of color, or working-class Elmwoodites, but for the most part white, middle class residents, those who also supported and practiced eco-conscious, permaculture-style gardening and hoopouses. This differentiation is significant, because it tracks the ways alternative food practices have been used in Elmwood and throughout the US to reproduce particular kinds of class difference and inequality. Whether obscuring the work of Latino immigrant farmworkers through evocations of Jeffersonian agrarianism (Alkon and McCullen 2011; Allen 2004; Gray 2014), rendering sites of alternative food consumption socially and spatially inaccessible through economic and cultural premiums (Allen et al. 2003; Paxson 2010; Slocum 2007), or stigmatizing non-participants through the moralizing language of self-care and responsible consumer-citizenship (Guthman 2008; Pudup 2008), alternative agrifood practices are routinely implicated in the perpetuation of race- and class-based distinction and inequality (see also Guthman 2003; Roseberry 1996).

While these processes of class identity-formation via participation in alternative agrifood systems are significant unto themselves, they also take on meaning within broader processes of class distinction *vis-a-vis* environmentalism. Across the US (and Europe) forms of urban environmentalism—from consumption behaviors to bicycle commuting to city planning priorities—are increasingly being used as part of the formation of middle class identity and status (Bryant and Goodman 2004; Griskevicius et al. 2010; Hoffmann and Lugo 2014; Isenhour 2010; Zukin 2008). Given the ecological benefits of, and resulting environmentalist motivations for, alternative agrifood practices, these activities too, can be folded into what I refer to as an emerging “green” middle class. By using environmentalist discourses to describe their practices and place them within the discursive object of the green city, gardeners and beekeepers in

Elmwood further distinguished themselves and their activities. In the case of permaculture-style gardening, this alignment also served to overcome aesthetic barriers to particular kinds of land use.

When I arrived in Elmwood in 2013 the permaculture community was celebrating something of a coup: the City had approved and installed rain gardens in the storm drains of the city's most affluent business district, Old Yards. The purpose of these rain gardens (like all rain gardens) was to slow the flow of water into the storm drain system while filtering out trash and other pollutants and providing habitat for nonhuman beings. The drains were the second major rain garden project implemented in the city, following on the success of a larger garden managing run-off behind a public building in the same business district. The rain gardens were also part of a larger effort by Elmwood's eco-conscious gardening community to implement permaculture-style landscaping strategies on a city-wide scale. These efforts, though not centrally coordinated, coalesced around three different kinds of land use—the aforementioned rain gardens, landscaping with native and edible tree species, and native, pollinator friendly gardens in medians and berms.



Figures 7.2 and 7.3 *The image on the left is of an Old Yards rain garden storm drain. The image on the right is of the larger rain garden located behind a public building in the same district.*

These efforts were met with mixed reviews in Elmwood. As an extension of certain kinds of ecological gardening practice, the permaculture landscaping projects had solid support among the city's eco-conscious gardeners. These projects, however, were not always aesthetically pleasing (see Figures 7.2 and 7.3). Tall plants growing in ways that mimicked their behavior in less human-shaped ecosystems were contentious in and of themselves. Furthermore, while pretty when they bloomed, once they died away in the fall they were inarguably eyesores. An at best limited case could be made for their attractiveness; the crux of support lay with these projects' ecological impacts. Supporters regularly cited the ways rain gardens, edible trees, and native plant pollinator gardens reduced the city's carbon footprint, limited the flow of pollution into the water table, and provided necessary habitat for nonhuman beings, thereby increasing biodiversity and securing the local food system. They were, in other words, green infrastructures, and came to be recognized as such. The permaculture community and its landscaping projects were cited specifically in Elmwood's master plan as potential green uses and redevelopment strategies for some of the city's abandoned industrial properties. Thus, these land use endeavors, by mobilizing environmentalist language, were able to gain a prominent place within Elmwood's green planning and development imaginary.

This level of political support for ecologically-sustainable urban land use practices is certainly a good thing, and more such policy agendas are needed across the US. The effects of this municipal support, however, require further examination. Elmwood's permaculturalists and their vocal supporters were by and large white and middle class. They were individuals like Leslie and Anna—people with high levels of education, professional white-collar employment, property, and leisure time. Like the “wildgarters” discussed by Rotenberg (1999), Elmwood's eco-conscious gardeners' class positions enabled them to insert different relationships between humans and nature into the urban landscape. Their class status alone, however, did not lead to the acceptance of their unconventional gardening and land use practices. These gardeners often

confronted opposition to their home-based permaculture projects, as neighbors raised concerns about declining property values in a real estate market where the appearance of “blight” signaled downward class mobility. Similar opposition was raised to permaculture-style landscaping, hoophouses, and the zoning ordinances legalizing chickens, bees, and front-yard and vacant lot vegetable gardening. Yet the zoning ordinances passed and permaculture was mentioned by name as part of Elmwood’s green future in the Master Plan.

Permaculturalists were able to attain such a degree of political support and policy inclusion in part because they used their economic resources, social networks, and environmentalist framework to undertake visible projects throughout the city. For example, the installation of a rain garden in one of Elmwood’s public parks in the mid-2000s relied on organization from the neighborhood association, grant funding, volunteered expertise from a landscape architect, and volunteered labor from neighborhood residents. Personal relationships with city planners and council members also provided familiarity with the requisite permit application and zoning approvals. Furthermore, highly visible, explicitly environmentalist projects such as this rain garden rendered permaculturalists’ activities legible within a planning and development discourse centered on the creation of a green, creative city. Located in public parks in middle-class neighborhoods or business districts, undertaken with volunteer labor from neighborhood residents, these projects could be seen and understood within established frameworks that posit “the environment” as a concern for middle class people and green infrastructures as desirable to those with middle class status and upward class mobility (e.g. the “creative class”). In other words, permaculturalists’ success stemmed in part from the degree to which their projects distinguished them as people with resources, education, and the right kinds of progressive values within the planning and development discourses employed by the city’s leaders. It is this positioning that subsequently allowed them to overcome opposition from other class-based concerns, like aesthetics. Those who raised concerns about the appearance of

hoophouses or permaculture-style gardens were simply stuck in the past, fuddy-duddies clinging to outdated ideas of what made a city prosperous (cf. Hoffman & Lugo 2014).

A “green” middle class

Central to Elmwood’s new master plan was the idea of the “green” city; that is, a city characterized by ample green space in the form of parks and non-automotive thoroughways, support and infrastructure for non-automotive transportation, renewable energy strategies, local economic sectors like food production and processing, and waste management strategies like recycling and composting. Such cities are increasingly heralded as a necessary component of human responses to climate change (Isenhour, McDonogh, and Checker 2015; OECD 2009). The prominence of the green city idea within US planning circles, and its inclusion in Elmwood’s master plan, however, are not solely the result of concern for climate change. These cities are also championed as desirable places to live (c.f. Florida 2002) and serve as locations for attracting and reproducing an emerging “green” middle class, defined as people who used at least a portion of their economic, educational, and social resources to communicate and reproduce their classed relationships via environmentally-conscious forms of consumption and land use practice.

While this discursive and policy framing of the City’s social and economic future cast opponents to environmentalist forms of land use like urban agriculture and permaculture-style landscaping as conservative fuddy-duddies, the history of urban gardening and chicken-raising in Elmwood suggests that opponents were not categorically opposed to change. They were people with histories and on-going experiences of class precarity, tied to the value, and thus appearance, of their homes. For these residents, support for these land uses was tempered by both urgent concerns about socioeconomic stability wherein employment opportunities and existing home values were not enough to ensure future well-being, and historic experiences of inequality tied to class-based discrimination over land use practices such as chicken raising. Opponents were also residents with relatively stable class positions for whom the value afforded by suburban land use

aesthetics as a personal preference and class marker was greater than the purported environmental benefits of urban agriculture and permaculture-style landscaping. Finally, the “fuddy-duddies” also included those residents confronting the ongoing effects of institutionalized and spatialized racial discrimination such that their majority African-American neighborhoods had to contend with environmental issues like blight, that did not necessarily fall within the interests of the conservation-minded, green citizenry.

Despite this diverse and multi-faceted opposition (or more accurately lack of support, as many of the aforementioned residents were not actively opposed to urban agriculture either) eco-conscious gardeners and supporters of hoopouses—and the two groups were nearly isomorphic—were able to generate support by positioning their cause within the framework of a green, creative city. For landscaping projects, and various other alternative food projects like a permanent farmers’ market space, this strategy was successful. In the case of hoopouses, however, it was not. Though supporters argued that these structures were essential components of the small scale, food-based, entrepreneurial production so key to Elmwood’s future as a green, creative city, concerns about just how disruptive they would be to the city’s landscape prevailed. Small, shed-size hoopouses would continue to be allowed, and full-size hoopouses could still be granted exceptions, but they would not be allowed anywhere in the city in the new form-based zoning code adopted in 2014.

Nevertheless, what both examples—the permaculture-style landscaping and the struggle for hoopouses—illustrate is that these practices were able to garner political attention, if not always policy inclusion, through their use of environmentalist framings. These framings, which tout things like rain gardens as ways to make Elmwood more environmentally sustainable, align with city’s green planning and development priorities. In this way, urban gardening became an instrument of environmental gentrification in Elmwood insofar as the eco-conscious practices of certain gardeners in the city were used to legitimate land use and economic development policies

that emphasized green, creative priorities over more mundane kinds of environmental maintenance and economic security.

While these planning discourses were an important arena in which the interests of working Elmwoodites and Elmwoodites of color were displaced in favor of those of white, middle class residents, the ways in which urban gardening was implicated in processes of class formation indicates the significance of what Checker (2011) calls a “green lifestyle” in environmental gentrification. To be clear, the emergence of a green middle class in Elmwood was an often-unintended outcome. While none of the eco-conscious gardeners with whom I spoke begrudged the status-boost their practices afforded them, neither did they cite status as a reason for gardening as they did. Most in fact felt that their status was under attack by neighbors with different aesthetic priorities, and were simultaneously concerned with the degree of racial and class inequality they noticed in their city. Yet the effects of this moment of class dynamism were real and can be seen in places like the City’s storm drains. In the affluent business district of Old Yards rain gardens in storm drains improve quality of life for human and nonhuman beings alike (while bolstering the city’s green, creative economic development agenda). Meanwhile, in the Williams-Bell neighborhood storm drains remained clogged with debris well into October. If not cleaned before the snow started to fall (beginning often in November), they would remain frozen and flood when the spring thaws arrived. If anywhere in the City needed the environmental care provided by rain garden storm drains, it was this neighborhood.⁹¹ And so these residents demanded street sweepers for their storm drains, employing the language of community, raising concerns about messy appearances and spring floods.

This framing of community care among working class people in a majority African-American neighborhood stands in marked contrast to the ways white, middle-class

⁹¹ Though given the prevailing concerns about blight, particularly overgrown properties, it is doubtful Williams-Bell residents would actually approve of rain garden storm drains. Whether such drains would be implemented in these neighborhoods or not is beside the point, however. What I wish to draw attention to here is the fact that constructing rain garden storm drains in parts of the city with very serious drainage problems was not even considered.

permaculturalists used the language of ecological sustainability and green urbanity to advance their storm drain project. This environmentalist framework—along with the fact that their rain garden project required no government funds—aligned neatly with city leaders’ planning and development priorities, garnering these Elmwoodites’ efforts visibility and support. Meanwhile, Elmwood’s history of racial discrimination, evidenced in sites like the infrastructural and discursive erasure of the Williams Street urban renewal project, combined with Williams-Bell residents’ use of community care-based language, to create conditions wherein Williams-Bell storm drains were not legible within the green, creative discourse that had come to dominate Elmwood’s planning and development policy. That is, neither permaculturalists nor city leaders actively sought to deny the Williams-Bell neighborhood the possible benefits of rain garden storm drains. However, differential class status, racial identity, and policy priorities, coupled with the city’s historically formed landscape of race-based spatial inequality, made the issues plaguing Williams-Bell storm drains nearly invisible to those outside the neighborhood.

With its use of both green and creative class discourses, Elmwood’s planning and development strategies, as articulated in the 2013 Master Plan, can and should be understood as a kind of environmental gentrification. This imagining of the City’s future posits economic prosperity through cultivation and attraction of green, creative class residents and businesses. While the environmentalist language and projects of Elmwood’s permaculturalists positions them within this imagined future, it is important to acknowledge that this imagining for the future was not necessarily shared by these gardeners. In our conversations and interviews, people like Leslie and Anna routinely couched their practices in language of ecological *care*, necessarily related to other forms of care, such as that for households and communities. While this directly aligns with a green lifestyle and the formation of a green middle class, this intentional project of creating urban environments that nurtured the well-being of human and nonhuman alike also speaks to deep seated priorities that were not reducible to the class-based interests exemplified in the project of building a green, creative Elmwood. In the next, and final, chapter I will explore this

tension between gardeners' goals and gardening's outcomes, and discuss what possibilities vegetable gardening and livestock raising, as practices of care, held for the transformation of Elmwood into a city where human and nonhuman beings might live will with together.

Chapter 8: “All gardening is a collaboration”: Care, Creative Labor, and the Making of Urban Environments

Toward the end of my fieldwork I increasingly focused on urban beekeeping, interested in the ways beekeepers’ relationships with their hives affected their perceptions of the city and relationships to other human and nonhuman beings. I had spoken on the subject at length with Maria, a leader with the Honeybee Initiative. She generously offered to put me in touch with several of the beekeeping households she worked with, which is how I met Lewis. Lewis and his partner lived in well-kept home in downtown Elmwood, on a street that would have at one time connected to former street grid of the Clayborne property. With all the buildings on the property razed, the street was instead an odd little spur of homes sandwiched between the end of the downtown business district and a large, vacant industrial property. I met with Lewis, a white man in his sixties, in October of 2014, as the days were getting shorter and colder. He described to me the efforts he and the other residents of the street had made in order to keep a sense of themselves as a kind of mini-neighborhood. The vacant lot across the street was exemplary of this.

When the house across the street had been demolished, the lot had become a kind of park, and in order to keep it that way, and prevent anything undesirable from taking its place, Lewis and his partner had purchased it. They kept about half of it in grass, and the other half was devoted to a vegetable garden, raspberry canes and strawberry patch, beehive, and “a place to drink wine and listen to the river” which formed the southern border of the lot. Lewis, who is unable to work due to a chronic illness, was an avid gardener. His yard was landscaped with an abundance of various ornamental plants, and the back was fenced in for his chickens. While he tended the fruits and vegetables across the street, the “bees [were] Maria’s thing.” He “enjoy[ed] watching them come and go and do their little dances,” but all the care and maintenance was done by her. He got a cut of honey in exchange for hosting the hive. Lewis, his partner, and Maria were not the only users of the lot. Others on the street were welcome to visit the property, and several of the neighbors had children who frequently played there and snacked on berries. In addition to

tending plants and chickens, Lewis also looked after the Clayborne property. “I take my 4x4 out and just go over the place, picking up trash, letting people know, you know, that someone is looking out, noticing things. So that no one thinks they can just dump trash there or anything.”

Standing on the lot across the street from his home, looking at the bare raspberry canes and watching the bees make their last forays before winter, listening to Lewis describe all the ways he cared for his community and their environment, I was deeply moved. It was the kind of moment that summed up all the possibilities Elmwood’s vegetable gardeners and beekeepers had shared with me. The ways cooperative labor can be used to creatively make the city home to diverse human and nonhuman beings. A dedication to the mutual well-being of one’s household, community, and ecosystems. The use of creative material labor to communicate that care through particular kinds of urban environments. In other words, this lot exemplified the kinds of urban environments possible through gardening and beekeeping as caring forms of creative, material labor.

But there is another, far less romantic and triumphalist way to interpret this moment. Lewis is indeed using his home, the vacant lot across the street, and his 4x4 to care for his household, community, and ecosystems, motivated out of a desire to live in a particular kind of environment, one that nurtures the mutual well-being of various people, plants, and animals. He is able to care in the ways that he does—ornamental and vegetable gardens, fruit patches, informal parks, chickens coops and beehives, trash patrols—in part because he owns a home, a vacant lot, and an all-terrain vehicle. There are many in Elmwood who share his desires for more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable forms of urban living but lack the kinds of resources to which Lewis has access. They do not own homes, let alone additional lots or recreational vehicles. While Lewis’ leisure time is the result of an illness, for many work and childcare are pursuits that claim nearly all their time. When these factors are considered, it becomes clear that the ability to care for one’s households, communities, and ecosystems through the creative material labor of

gardening and beekeeping, and the ways one is able to enact that caring labor, emerge from certain kinds of privilege.

The looming presence of Clayborne next door reminds us of the ways inequality and privilege operate on the level of the city as well. This large swath of vacant land awaiting redevelopment that may never come is the result of historic process of industrialization and deindustrialization, operating through the ways the economic valuations of land and labor are realized via social and political relationships. Elmwood's strategic geographic position, along major transportation routes, bordered by agricultural land that could be used to site factories, made it a center of twentieth century automobile manufacturing. The resulting reformulation of the town into a working-class city made it possible decades later to render it a necessary, if unfortunate, site of collateral damage in the transition to a postindustrial, service-based national economy. The spatial and financial burden that Clayborne exerts on the city is a reminder that these costs are ongoing, that the legacies of industrialization and deindustrialization continue to constrain future economic and social possibilities for the city and its residents, such as when Elmwoodites must decide whether the costs of undeveloped public space are greater than those of developments that do not fit with their imaginings of the city's future.

How to hold these two versions of this moment together? There is often a tension in the experiences and analysis of environmentalist and social justice efforts among white, middle-class residents of the developed world, between a desire to identify real, practicable solutions and maintaining a critical stance toward these strategies' shortcomings (see for example Isenhour 2011; Lyon 2011). Frequently, the focus is on one or the other, or assumes that failings cancel out benefits (though neither Isenhour nor Lyon are guilty of this). Yet the possibilities offered by activities like urban gardening and beekeeping, and the ways these practices reproduce inequalities based on differences of class and race, exist and are experienced in simultaneity. Moreover, ways of creating more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable forms of urban life are increasingly needed. Racial inequality persists within the United States and income

inequality continues to increase. Meanwhile political, policy-based responses to climate change remain sorely lacking in the United States and far from adequate globally. Furthermore, these problems are not unrelated, as the negative effects of global warming are more likely to impact poor and working people, and people of color in the US and around the world—those with the fewest resources to counter these effects and the least power with which to change environmental policy. It is thus imperative to hold in tension the possibilities and contradictions offered by urban gardening, to take seriously both what might be possible through these gardens and what is undesirable. In this dissertation, I have argued that the production of the environment is a framework that allows us to do just that, to identify the desires for mutual well-being and better futures that motivate urban gardeners as well as the ways these practitioners' embeddedness within particular social and spatial landscapes reproduce unequal class- and race-based relationships.

The Production of the Environment as a Framework for Thinking about Gardening

Environments, like space, are not empty containers housing human action in the world (Lefebvre 1991; Low 2000). They are created, things that come into being as people relate to one another, nonhuman beings, and the natural world (Ingold 2000; Katz 2004; Loftus 2012). And these creations act back, as environments in turn shape the ways relations amongst humans and nature are formed and enacted. For example, the Hilltop Community Garden comes into being as neighbors join together to make a rich and vibrant habitat for pollinating insects, produce healthy food and recreation for themselves, and provide their community with a visually appealing public space. At the same time, this environment engenders relationships between passersby and pollinators, facilitates the education and socialization of the children who come to tend it with their parents, and contributes to the widespread belief that the surrounding neighborhood is a good place to live. In this way, though, existing social and ecological relations become materialized and maintained through the urban environment. The Hilltop Community Garden is

located near the city's most used park, in one of its most affluent neighborhoods, in other words, in a place already reaping the social and ecological benefits something like a community garden brings. Nevertheless, opportunities to make otherwise the relations that co-produce environments, as well as the environments themselves, unfold within the space of the garden. People from all over the city pass by the Hilltop Community Garden, and as they enjoy the sights and smells of flowers thrumming with honeybees, have the chance to consider that they and these insects might indeed live well together.

Furthermore, these processes of producing urban environments are laden with care. Whether providing oneself with pleasurable leisure time, one's household with fresh and healthy food, one's community with outdoor gathering space, or habitat for various nonhuman species, gardening was routinely a way that Elmwoodites provided for the mutual well-being of themselves and diverse others. As discussed in Chapter 4, this care took many forms. At its most basic level, gardens provided care for households in the form of resources, whether affordable vegetables or means of provisioning in the face of uncertain socioecological futures. But as the examples of both the Towerview Community Garden and the Hilltop Community Garden demonstrated, often the care enacted through gardening extends beyond the self and household, to include communities and ecosystems. For these groups gardening was a way to care for their neighbors; at Towerview the garden provided low-income elderly and/or disabled residents with opportunities for outdoor recreation and an outdoor gathering space, both things to which their access was severely curtailed due to a lack of resources and their location on marginal land. It was also a way to care for urban ecosystems, as when the Hilltop gardeners planted and maintained flowers and herbs that provided habitat for honeybees and other pollinating insects. As the example of Dylan showed, for some these acts of care were also undertaken with a definite sense of temporality. Gardening offered a way to ensure well-being for household, community, and ecosystem in the present moment, but also in ways that extended into the future by providing opportunities for the kinds of knowledge transmission, sociality, and ecologically sustainable

food production practices that might allow communities and their environments to persist for subsequent generations.

It is in the ways that gardening enacts care that a sense of this activity as one of possibility emerges. What kinds of communities and ecosystems, of urban environments, could come into being from gardeners' desires for mutual well-being among themselves and diverse other human and nonhuman beings, now and into the future? When Towerview gardeners create for themselves a sense of community based in shared labor and outdoor socializing, or Hilltop gardeners create multispecies habitat that nurtures pollinators and brings pleasure to people, it seems possible to think that urban vegetable gardening and beekeeping might in fact transform urban life in ways that fostered greater social equity and ecological sustainability.

But in considering gardening as a form of care work, the role of race- and class-based differences in shaping these possibilities becomes apparent, for not everyone has an equal capacity to care. Furthermore, the ways that people care, and the needs and desires those forms of care address, are both the products of varying experiences of class and race. There is indeed a difference in emphasis between the Towerview and Hilltop Community Gardens, between care for community and care for ecosystem, a difference that is directly related to these gardeners' rather divergent experiences of class. For gardeners in places like Towerview and Tremont, environmental needs are urgent and immanent. Residents need healthy and affordable food, children need safe outdoor places to learn and play, the community needs public space in which to gather and ways in which to communicate to themselves and to outsiders that their neighborhoods are cared for and of value. Gardens are one way that working class Elmwoodites and Elmwoodites of color do just that. While many of them are also concerned about environmental sustainability and the well-being of their ecosystems, and desire to have relationships predicated on care with a variety of species from plants to birds to soil microbes, the needs of their communities and neighborhoods were experienced as much more pressing, and took priority among their caring labors.

Moreover, it is because they live in neighborhoods that have safe, outdoor spaces to gather and for children to play, that their basic need for food is secure, and that their property values are not in a free-fall, that eco-conscious gardeners, in part, are able to focus their gardening practices on ecological care. What is more, their focus on creating ecologically sustainable cities and use of environmentalist language in many ways align their practices with newly formulated planning and development goals, which focus on making Elmwood into a green, creative city. Their use of tall, weedy pollinator-friendly gardens in their front yards and in various public spaces inspired push-back from their fellow middle-class neighbors concerned that the appearance of these gardens was far too disruptive of the suburban land use aesthetics that dominated the city and underwrote property value. Yet eco-conscious gardeners were able to benefit from the ways their activities aligned with the city's development priorities and to ensure a place for their gardening and livestock raising practices in the city through for example, the passage of protective zoning ordinances. Furthermore, their practices served to legitimate the city's green, creative policy priorities in ways that inadvertently supported the diversion of attention from environmental concerns in working class and majority African-American neighborhoods. As a result, problems such as adequate storm drain clearance in Williams-Bell were given less attention within Elmwood's policy-oriented and popular discourses, all too often ignored completely.

Together these differences in caring priorities and the kinds of environmental gentrification that eco-conscious gardeners were (if unknowingly or unwillingly) party to served to reproduce inequalities based on differences of race and class. Their bees and chickens and wild garden provided a new visual, spatial marker of difference, and their alignment with city policy priorities helped privilege their land uses and (some) of the concerns materialized therein. Elmwood's planning and development priorities—shaped largely through the input of white, middle-class residents—were to make a green, creative city. Working class gardeners and gardeners of color did not articulate their practices in terms of environmentalism or

entrepreneurialism, but rather community care. Thus, their activities, and the concerns on which they were founded, were not registered as vital to the future of the city in the language of planning and development.

It is in such conflicts over environmental priorities that the tension between possibilities for mutual flourishing and for maintaining race- and class-based inequalities becomes apparent. In Tremont, for example, the community gardeners were engaged primarily in the work of caring for their community. These residents were using gardening to make a place where children could learn and play, struggling residents could get much needed food, and residents, as well as outsiders, could see tangible evidence that the neighborhood was cared for and valued. But gardeners like Hope and Ms. Dolores did so in ways deeply shaped by their experiences of being black and working class. Discrimination in housing based on race, class, and regional origin, as well as a desire to live close to industrial employers, concentrated working people and people of color in particular neighborhoods, like Tremont. With livelihoods closely tied to manufacturing, and fewer material, educational, and social resources with which to counter losses of employment and wealth, these neighborhoods and their residents disproportionately suffered from the impacts of deindustrialization and the subsequent retrenchment of public social services. The effects were even more intense for working people of color, who also faced discrimination in hiring and promotion, and additional forms of institutionalized race-based inequality. The results were households and communities struggling to make ends meet, let alone maintain private and public space to middle-class aesthetic standards and provide social services like recreational programming for youth and senior citizens.

Thus, the community needs to which the Tremont gardeners were responding differed, if not in substance than certainly in degree, from those facing gardeners like Anna, who lived in a white, middle class neighborhood. Here, residents had the personal resources to care for their homes and yards, schools and parks were within walking distance and well-maintained, and the neighborhood was widely known as a good place to live. Here too the important work of caring

for urban ecosystems took center stage for many gardeners, as their particular practices, such as pollinator-friendly plant selection, and the language they used to describe them, emphasized multispecies relationships of care. Framing these different caring priorities as part of the process of producing urban environments, I argue, enables us to consider these variations in the ways gardening is practiced. It also, as I address in the remainder of this chapter, leads to several key conclusions regarding the kinds of urban environments produced through the caring, creative labor of gardening.

What Kinds of Environments Are Produced through Gardening?

Sage was one of the more out-of-the ordinary gardeners I met, even for a permaculturalist. Her entire shady yard was given over to food production of one kind or another. Hugelkultur mounds dotted the front lawn, raised beds ran along the sides of her and her husband's urban Elmwood Township home (the street grid of her neighborhood is contiguous with that of an Elmwood City neighborhood), and the backyard was a food forest⁹² in progress. In addition, she kept a traditional row crop garden in the backyard of the business next door, which was unshaded, and a community garden plot about two miles away. When I visited Sage's home to conduct an interview in the summer of 2014, the tour lasted nearly an hour, as we carefully picked our way along narrow foot paths traversing her half-acre lot. The array of plants she pointed out to me were so numerous and diverse that I could not remember half of them when I sat down to take notes afterwards. The purpose of all this gardening was two-fold. Sage enjoyed nature, and being outdoors, reminiscing during our interview about mountain climbing and days-long excursions

⁹² Food forests are a permaculture production technique intended to mimic the growing behaviors of boreal forests. Each layer, from the ground to shrubs to trees, is carefully considered and plants are selected to grow amenably and symbiotically with one another (called companion planting). The goal is to produce a maximum amount of food per given piece of land while also creating ecosystems capable of sustaining and regenerating themselves. For example, one might have the lower layers be various root vegetables and perennial herbs, planted amidst shrubs such as blueberries, with a mixture of fruit and nut trees for the upper layers, and vines such as grapes spanning the various strata.

into the woods during her youth abroad. She was also firmly committed to growing as much of her own food as possible for reasons of self-sufficiency and ecological sustainability.

To that end, she had also helped found a growers' cooperative, a group of about five permaculturalists who jointly planned what they would plant on a portion of their land and met during the growing season to pool what they had produced. Fruits, vegetables, and herbs were weighed in order to track production levels, and then divided up equally amongst the week's contributors. Each went home with a five-gallon bucket or two brimming with different kinds of produce.

With her yard nearly full-shade, Sage was always looking for more places to grow and had recently approached a neighbor about putting a raised bed in the front corner of their corner-lot. The neighbor had declined, but Sage was pleased she had at least introduced the idea to him. Her neighbor was not the only one uncertain about Sage's gardening zeal. While she received numerous compliments for her ingenuity and abundant harvests, she also had people complain; more than one had pulled their car over in front of her yard to ask what all the mess was about. She had also tangled with Township code enforcement over a large number of leaves she had arranged to be dumped in her backyard for composting purposes. Thus, while Sage was engaged in creating an urban environment that produced an abundance of food through ecologically sustainable methods, she necessarily did so in ways that entangled her not only with the various nonhuman beings she nurtured, but also with an array of human beings, from government officials to uncertain neighbors to fellow permaculture gardeners.

Intentional Environments

Sage's experience demonstrates the ways that gardens, as urban environments, are produced with a great deal of intentionality. Gardeners like Sage have specific ideas about how they want their environments to be and what they ought to produce. These ideas can be limited to simply a wish for fresh, healthy food or emerge from desires to live in neighborhoods with recreational green

space or in ecologically sustainable cities. Regardless of the outcomes gardeners labor toward, these Elmwoodites shared a belief that gardening was a worthwhile way of creating the kinds of households, communities, and ecosystems in which they wanted to live.

What Sage's experience also demonstrates—in the ways her gardens came to be through a nexus of land availability, neighbors' expectations, the various growth patterns of plants, cultural knowledge, government regulations, and the process of making soil—is that the production of environments is necessarily a messy affair. It involves an array of complex relationships, from various social hierarchies to intricate, multi-scalar ecosystems, that elude complete control by any given actor. There are always unpredictable agencies and unintended consequences. And in the narratives of Elmwood's gardeners, it is also often a process from which they feel deeply alienated. Yet what makes gardening particular is the sense it gives these practitioners that they are in fact actively engaged, along with diverse multispecies others, in producing their environments. For gardening is a form of creative, material labor, requiring practitioners to exert physical labor in a tangible relationship to the nonhuman world. Gardeners like Lara and Jennifer spoke about the profound impact touching the soil, laboring alongside nonhuman beings like grasshoppers and vegetable plants, and consuming the fruits of their labor had on their understandings of themselves as beings entangled in complex ecosystems and political-economies. Through the physical, often tedious and repetitive, labor of caring for plants these gardeners made food, opportunities to socialize and share knowledge, outdoor recreational space, and multispecies habitat. They worked in quite direct and purposeful, if relatively unremarkable ways, to produce the kinds of social and natural worlds they wished to inhabit.

Caring Environments

The environments desired and labored toward by Lara, Jennifer, Sage, and most of the other Elmwood gardeners with whom I spoke were ones characterized by care. That is, these gardeners wished to live in environments that nurtured the well-being of themselves, as well as other human

and nonhuman beings, both now and into the future. In this way, the urban environments created by Elmwood's gardeners represent a kind of claim for particular sorts of social and ecological relationality.

There is an extensive literature within urban anthropology and geography on urban citizenship and the right to city (Ghannam 2002; Harvey 2000; Holston 2009; Holston and Appadurai 1996; Mitchell 2003; Monroe 2016; Zhang 2002). These scholars have argued that it is through inhabitation, not necessarily legal recognition, that people come to be members of a city, and that it is through the ways they occupy, utilize, and appropriate space—including gardening (Eizenberg 2012; Staeheli and Mitchell 2008)—that they are able to make claims on that polity. In quite physically reworking urban environments, rearranging and creating relationships between material space, people, and nonhuman beings, gardeners concretized and enacted the kinds of urban life they desired for themselves and others. When Sage drew on her Taiwanese heritage to select food crops that can grow in her shaded front yard and helped establish a cooperative with her fellow gardeners she was actively making the conditions she considered necessary for an ecologically sustainable and socially equitable life. In other words, the environments Elmwoodites produced through their gardens were attempts to claim space and prefigure the kinds of urban community and ecology they desired, ones that nurtured the mutual well-being of human and nonhuman life. Yet just as these claims arise from the ways gardeners understand and experience themselves as entangled in a host of social and ecological relationships, so too do these entanglements often give rise to unintended effects, ones that do not necessarily further gardeners' goals.

Unequal Environments?

In working to make the kinds of urban environments they desired for themselves and others, gardeners made a lot of other things too, as they brought with them to the process all the various social relationships, such as race-based inequalities and class identifications, in which they were

already entangled. For example, Anna's desires for social equity and sustainability (discussed in Chapter 5) were not negated by her positionality as a well-educated, employed, white homeowner in a middle-class, majority white neighborhood. But this positionality did complicate her desires and her efforts to realize them, as she brought the ability to not worry for her household's day-to-day sustenance and safety, and access to specific kinds of resources and social milieu, with her into the cooperative, autarchic communities she sought to build. Similarly, Bill and Jane's desires for greater ecological sustainability and household self-sufficiency existed alongside their desires for neighborhood sociality and uplift, and in their efforts to realize both simultaneously, particular assumptions about working-class land use practices and the validity of middle-class, suburban lawn aesthetics, were maintained. The working-class history of their neighborhood, and the expectations about "proper" land use and lawn care it has engendered in residents, ultimately shaped the spatial forms and planting practices that Bill and Jane engaged in, though they found creative ways to work within these constraints toward their personal goals. In other words, gardeners' wishes for more pleasurable, equitable, and sustainable forms of urban life did not negate nor extricate them from existing social relationships, cultural practices, relations to nonhuman beings, and desires for the future.

While gardeners' claims to more caring urban environments were complicated by the often unintended effects that resulted from entanglement in complex social and ecological relationships, entanglement in these webs of relations is not necessarily a bad thing. As the turn toward more-than-human and multispecies approaches in social theory and ethnography has argued, humans are best thought of as beings that exist through our relations to other forms of life (and non-life). Scholars from Whatmore (2002) to Haraway (2008) to Alaimo (2016) have suggested that it is in fact conceptualizations of the human as an autonomous individual being and species that underpin many of the worst forms of environmental exploitation and degradation facing earth's inhabitants today, and continue to be present in environmentalist efforts to "preserve" or "conserve" nature as a thing apart. They suggest that an understanding of the

human as permeable, co-constituted, and always in a state of becoming in relation to others could provide the grounds for a caring environmental ethics, one predicated on existing forms of multispecies being and relationality and committed to mutual well-being within those relationships (see also Loftus 2012).

When gardeners tangibly feel that their material labor connects them to the “basics of life,” when they work alongside others to care for their households, communities, and ecosystems, when they confront, however obliquely, the ways inequalities based on differences of race and class shape their practices, they realize, in albeit circumscribed ways, themselves as socially, culturally, and ecologically entangled beings. Following Tsing (2015), I conclude by suggesting that it is from moments such as these, wherein this relationality can be perceived, that the entanglements it entails can subsequently be traced. In so doing, questions about how we might all live well with one another, now and into the future, can be raised. This occurs when Dylan, teaching his son to nurture something which nurtures him, reflects on the ways his well-being is intimately tied to that of the soil, and follows the political-economic relations that obfuscate that relationship while depleting the soil. It also occurs when Ms. Dolores gets her neighbors some of what they need, providing food, education, and gathering space, while asking what kind of environment Tremont residents like her desire and why they do not have it.

In other words, gardening provides Elmwoodites with a way to recognize and trace the ways they are bound up in myriad relationships to other human and nonhuman beings, and in so doing, also identify the types of inequalities and power that inhere in them. Admittedly, this seldom happened in Elmwood. Dylan became involved with protests against industrial agriculture and corporate control of food production, and Ruth remained deeply involved in disability rights activism, but by and large Elmwoodites did not translate their gardening into broader political statements. In fact, Anna’s recognition in our interview about the absence of working people and people of color from much of the alternative agrifood projects in Elmwood was one of the few times such things were even mentioned, though gardeners were for the most part acutely aware of

the broader race- and class-based inequalities in their city. Nevertheless, if gardening is an activity wherein practitioners begin to think of themselves as embedded and entangled, it opens the possibility for thinking about the ways gardening as a practice is embedded and entangled within existing political relationships and inequalities based on differences of class and race. If those working toward greater social equity and ecological sustainability in Elmwood wish for ways to further their goals, I would suggest two steps. First, building increased knowledge around the classed and raced histories of urban gardening and livestock raising in the city. Second, beginning to parse the ways particular white, middle-class gardeners frame their activities in environmentalist languages and how this aligns with the city's land use and economic development priorities, for this alignment subsequently elides the history of these practices in the city, and the ways they continue to be used in poor, working class, and majority African-American neighborhoods as a form of community care.

Are urban vegetable gardening and beekeeping going to radically transform our cities into sites of more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable urban life? No. They are far too embedded in existing and historic inequalities, based on differences of class and race. Are urban vegetable gardening and beekeeping necessary to the types of equitable and sustainable cities that the Elmwoodites discussed here imagine for themselves? They would argue, and I agree, yes. The current regime of industrial agriculture generates far too great environmental externalities, such as the rates of carbon dioxide emitted into the earth's atmosphere, and social injustice, in the exploited bodies and exhausted lands of people of color and of the Global South. Other ways of growing our food are needed, and urban gardening is one of a diversity of methods that will be required in a radically transformed food system.

With that in mind, gardening and beekeeping seem as good of places as any to begin working toward future cities where human and nonhuman beings alike might live well together. In addition to providing healthy, fresh food to urban dwellers at far lower environmental impacts, urban vegetable gardening and beekeeping are also activities that entangle practitioners in various

social, cultural, and ecological relationships as they seek to produce their environments in ways that realize their desires for more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable forms of urban life. While these entanglements often lead gardeners into maintaining inequalities based on differences of class and race, they also represent moments of possibility, for recognizing and responding to both entanglement and the relationships which shape its forms and expression.

Appendix A: Interview schedules and ethnographic survey

Community Garden Representative Interview Guide

Q1: Name of community garden

Q2: How long have you been the representative/steward for this garden? How long have you been a member of this garden?

Q3: When was this garden founded? Who participated? Can you tell me how the garden has developed and changed since then?

Q4: Is there a land use agreement in place? If so, with whom?

Q5: Is this garden partnered with any organization? If so, who? How is that partnership organized?

Q6: How is the garden governed? What are the rules, how were they developed, who makes decisions? Are their leaders, and if so, how are they selected?

Q7: How many people participate in the garden? What part of town are they from? Are the gardeners a diverse group of people?

Q8: How are plots allocated? Are there fees? Are there any donation plots?

Q9: Where does water come from?

Q10: Does anyone in the garden produce for market?

Q11: Are there any events, formal or informal, held in the garden for a) gardeners, and b) the broader public?

Q12: Do you partner or share resources or activities with other community gardens? If so, which ones? Other community organizations?

Q13: What are the goals of the garden?

Q14: What are the biggest challenges facing the garden?

Q15: What are the greatest strengths of the garden?

Community/Backyard Gardener Ethnographic Interview Guide

Q1: You've gardened for *[supplied from survey]* years. Why did you start? How did you learn?

Q2: Has your gardening changed any since then? If yes, how and why?

Q3: Why do you garden now? *For community gardeners:* Why garden in a community garden? *For backyard gardeners:* Why garden in your backyard?

Q4: What are some of the biggest challenges you personally face in gardening? *For community gardeners:* What are some of the biggest challenges facing the community garden?

Q5: What results or benefits from gardening have you seen or experienced, for yourself and for others?

Q6: You've lived in Elmwood *[supplied from survey]* years. *If all their life:* What was it like growing up here? How has your life here changed over the years? *If not:* Where did you grow up? Where did you live before moving here?

Q7: A lot of people have moved out of the city. What keeps you here?

Q8: You work as a *[supplied from survey]*. How long have you done that for? What did you do before that? What other jobs have you had?

Q9: You participate in civic activities *[supplied from survey]*. For how long have you participated in each? Why? *If no civic activities:* Have you ever considered participating in a civic activity, like a neighborhood association? Why or why not?

Q10: What other community activities do you participate in (*e.g. co-op board, religious group, local band, etc.*)? For how long have you participated in each? Why?

Q11: Do you think it is easy or difficult to get involved in community and/or civic activities in Elmwood? Why or why not?

Q12: What do you think the biggest challenges facing Elmwood and Southeast Michigan are? What would you do about them?

Q13: Do you think you have any control, or say so, over what happens in your neighborhood, or in Elmwood? Why or why not? What about Michigan? The US?

Q14: What do you think Elmwood and Southeast Michigan's greatest strengths are?

Q15: Have you gotten to know other people through gardening? If so, how? Can you give an example?

Q16: Have you gotten involved in other activities as a result of gardening? If so, how? Can you give examples?

Q17: Do you feel a sense of camaraderie with your fellow gardeners? Why or why not?

Q18: What kinds of things do you do with other gardeners (*e.g. workshops, cooperatives, hanging out, etc.*)? Why?

Q19: Do you like the way the garden is physically organized – both organization within the garden, and the garden in relation to its surroundings? [*Use site map as prompt if available.*]

Q20: Why do you think it's organized in this way?

Q21: What would you change? Why?

Q22: What impact do you think the garden has on the surrounding neighborhood? What impact do you think gardening has on Elmwood?

Q23: What do you think the city's land use priorities are? Why?

Q24: What would your land use priorities be? Why?

Q25: *For backyard gardeners:* Why do you choose to use your yard for gardening, and not some other activity?

Q26: *For community gardeners:* Do you think gardening is the best use of the land? Why or why not?

Q27: What's your dream neighborhood or city like?

Community/Backyard Gardener Ethnographic Survey

Name

Age _____

Gender

Race

Education level (*circle highest*): Some High School High School diploma/GRE
 Some College education Bachelor's degree Graduate level

Occupation

Income: <\$40,000 \$40,000-\$200,000 >\$200,000

Do you: Rent Own Stay with friends or family

What neighborhood do you live in?

How long have you lived in Elmwood?

How long have you gardened?

How long have you gardened in this location?

Why do you garden? List your top three reasons. _____

What do you do with the produce from your garden? _____

What are your top three concerns for Southeast Michigan, as a region? _____

What civic activities do you participate in? Examples: neighborhood associations, city council meetings, PTO.

Are you willing to participate in a follow-up interview? _____

If yes, what is the best way to contact you? _____

Appendix B: Community Gardens: Characteristics and Descriptions

Table B.1 Elmwood’s Community Gardens.

“Location” refers to the neighborhood unless otherwise indicated (with neighborhood in parenthesis). All individual plots gardens did one communal plot, designated for donation to a food gleaning organization; designation as communal refers to beds in addition to a donation bed and other shared spaces like borders and pathways. Membership refers to whether the garden was open to anyone, or to just members of a specific organization or neighborhood.

<i>Name</i>	Location	Property Owners.	Assoc. Org.	Plot Style	Memb.	Interview	Case Study
<i>Towerview Community Garden</i>	Old Adams	Private	Towerview Apts	Individual & Communal	Closed	Yes	Yes
<i>Downtown Elmwood Community Garden</i>	Old Yards	Public	No	Individual	Open	Yes	Yes
<i>Orchard Park Yard & Garden Club</i>	Orchard Park	Private	Orchard Park NA	N/A	Closed	N/A	Yes
<i>Pick-and-Share Garden</i>	University Campus	Private	University	Individual & Communal	Open	Yes	No
<i>Cooperative Orchard and Garden Park</i>	Williams-Bell	Private-Collective	No	Individual & Communal	Open	Yes	No
<i>Poplar Point Community Garden</i>	Elmwood Township	Private	Poplar Point Apts	Individual	Closed	Yes	No
<i>Central Elmwood Community Garden</i>	Senate Hill	Private	No	Individual	Open	Yes	No
<i>New Recoveries Community Garden</i>	Sowing Change Center	Private-NGO	New Recoveries Addiction Treatment Center	Communal	Closed	Yes	No
<i>Green Gate Community Garden</i>	Hilltop	Public	Hilltop NA	Individual	Open	Yes	No
<i>Williams-Bell Community Center Garden</i>	Williams-Bell	Public	Williams-Bell Community Center	Communal	Closed (Youth)	Yes	No

Table B.1 (continued)

<i>Childrens' Center Garden</i>	Williams-Bell	Public	No	Individual & Communal	Open	Yes	No
<i>Hilltop Community Garden</i>	Hilltop	Public	No	Individual	Open	Yes	Yes
<i>Elmwood Community Services Garden</i>	Old Yards	Private	Elmwood Community Services	Communal	Closed	Yes	No
<i>St. Andrew's Community Garden</i>	Orchard Park	Private	St. Andrew's Church	Individual	Open	No	No
<i>Park Tower Community Garden</i>	Downtown	Private	Park Tower Apts	Individual	Closed	Yes	No
<i>Tremont Community Garden</i>	Tremont	Public	Tremont NA	Communal	Closed	Yes	Yes

Community Garden Descriptions

The Hilltop Community Garden was the most traditional in structure and membership. Plots were individually rented, and gardeners were drawn almost exclusively from the surrounding neighborhood, Hilltop. As such, all the garden members (N=11) in 2013 and 2014 were white and most were middle class. Many of these members had been gardeners at Hilltop for multiple years in a row, and several helped found the garden in 2005. This particular community garden is located on public property.

The Downtown Elmwood Community Garden also used an individual plot rental structure and was located on public property. This particular garden, however, drew participants from all over the city, though mostly the nearby east side (High-Oak and Park Heights) and Adams Park neighborhoods.⁹³ The Downtown Elmwood garden struggled with a high-rate of turnover (I could not ascertain exact membership numbers, ≈6–12) and internal conflicts. Of all the case study gardens, I had the least amount of contact with Downtown Elmwood and it contributed the least to my analysis. This is disappointing, because the garden is perhaps the most committed to ecological methods while being one of the most publicly visible.

The Tremont Community Garden, like the Hilltop garden, is embedded in a neighborhood (Tremont). Unlike Hilltop, though, it does not employ a traditional plot rental structure. In 2013 and 2014 the garden was cultivated as one large community plot, with about a third of the area reserved for a summer youth program. The garden itself is located on the property of the neighborhood Community Center, making it also highly visible. It sits toward the front of the lot, along the neighborhood's main road. There is a bus stop and the sidewalk is fairly well-traveled. While the Tremont garden had the smallest number of regular participants (3–5 in 2013–2014; all African-American and working class; about a dozen children participated in the summer program

⁹³ While I conducted an interview with Downtown Elmwood Community Garden steward, participated in a workday, and conducted observations, I was not able to interview any gardeners from this project. This is indicative of the problems this garden experienced in cultivating a sense of shared participation, which were confirmed in casual conversations with several past and present gardeners.

and there is an unknown number of one-off users), it was very closely tied up in the life of the neighborhood, and considered an important resource by many residents. Due to its communal plot structure, the Tremont garden relied almost exclusively on group workdays for routine maintenance and as a result I did most of my actual gardening (aside from my own community garden plot) during my research period here.

The Towerview Community Garden played a similarly significant role in the life of its associated community. Like Tremont, it had communal gardening areas, though these were combined with individually assigned plots or wheelchair accessible beds (though no rental fees were applied). This garden was associated with an apartment complex (Towerview) that was designated for disabled or elderly recipients of Section 8 housing vouchers. While all members of the garden could be considered poor, they were the most racially diverse group of gardeners; a quarter of the garden's eight members were African-American. All Towerview gardeners were from the associated apartment complex, which presented particular challenges. Most gardeners had limited physical abilities due to age or disability, and relied on volunteers, recruited from within the apartment complex or through community service organizations, to do more intense physical tasks, such as till the soil or build and repair beds. In an effort to respond to this need, I became a regular volunteer at the Towerview garden, doing a wide range of manual labor from hauling compost to laying pavement stones, but very little actual gardening. The garden also struggled with fundraising, and acquiring money for various projects required an outsize amount of attention from members. During my time working with this garden I assisted in several fundraising efforts and helped write a (successful) grant to finance the expansion of the garden's wheelchair accessible section.

The Orchard Park Yard and Garden Club was the most radically different in structure. This group was not a community garden, but a community organization composed of individual backyard vegetable gardeners—and gardeners who strictly grew ornamental plants—who socialized around their shared hobby, shared information, and participated in collective

neighborhood beautification projects. The Club was an outgrowth of a Habitat for Humanity community organizing project in the neighborhood. I regularly attended monthly group meetings, assisted in the Club's annual plant sale, and visited several members' homes. All but one member of the Club was white, and most members could be considered working to middle class. As part of an effort to revitalize the neighborhood after its devastation by decades of deindustrialization and the Great Recession of 2008, the Club members had very specific goals regarding improving life within the neighborhood and the perception of Orchard Park among outsiders.

Appendix C: Gardener Characteristics

Data below are from seventy-three completed ethnographic surveys. Of these seventy-three individuals forty-four were interviewed; twenty-four community gardeners and twenty backyard gardeners. An additional forty-eight individuals were interviewed for this project who were not surveyed; they are not represented in the chart below.

“Job” categories applied after data collection. “Motivation” categories applied after data collection; category listed represents the top motivation after response categories having to do with producing food and the quality of that food were removed. Nearly all survey respondents listed “food” or some food attribute (fresh, healthy, local) as their primary motivation.

Table C.1 Gardener Characteristics

Age	Gender	Race	Income	Ed Level	Job
18-29 N=7	Women N=61	White N=57	<\$40,000 N=26	Some HS N=1	Education N=21
20-29 N=1	Men N=12	Blank N=6	\$40,000- \$200,000 N=42	HS/GRE N=2	White collar service N=16
30-39 N=21		African-Am N=5	>\$200,000 N=1	Some College N=12	Service N=9
40-49 N=18		Mixed-White, Native Am N=2	Blank N=4	BA N=18	Retired N=9
50-59 N=11		Arabic N=1		Graduate N=39	Public service N=5
60-69 N=11		Mixed-Latina N=1		Blank N=1	Laborer N=5
70-79 N=3		African N=1			Unemployed N=2
80-89 N=1					Mother N=2
					Health care N=2
					Blank N=2
Total N = 73					

Table C.1 (continued)

Home Ownership	Neighborhood	Type of Garden	Motivation	Interview
Own <i>N=56</i>	Hilltop <i>N=17</i>	Home <i>N=49</i>	Pleasure <i>N=49</i>	No <i>N=43</i>
Rent <i>N=15</i>	Orchard Park <i>N=10</i>	Comm Garden <i>N=8</i>	Environment <i>N=7</i>	Yes <i>N=30</i>
Stay w/ family <i>N=1</i>	High-Oak <i>N=10</i>	Both <i>N=15</i>	Outdoors <i>N=6</i>	
Blank <i>N=1</i>	Elm. Twncshp <i>N=6</i>		Relationships <i>N=6</i>	
	Park Heights <i>N=5</i>		Health <i>N=1</i>	
	Towerview <i>N=4</i>		None (besides food, food quality) <i>N=4</i>	
	Maplewood <i>N=4</i>			
	Old Yards <i>N=4</i>			
	Other Elm. City <i>N=3</i>			
	Tremont <i>N=3</i>			
	Other Twncshp <i>N=3</i>			
	Blank <i>N=5</i>			
<u>Total</u> N = 73				

Appendix D: Collective Garden Project Descriptions

Farmers' Markets

Elmwood is home to two farmers' markets. One is located in Old Yards, and occurs on Saturday mornings like many traditional farmers' markets in the US. The other farmers' market is located in the downtown business district, on the street by the post office.⁹⁴ It is held Tuesday afternoon/evenings in order to accommodate the schedules of those who work. Both markets are managed by Sowing Change and use a wooden token system, in addition to cash, to accommodate the use of EBT, credit/debit cards, and various incentive programs.⁹⁵ I made an effort to attend both markets when possible, chatting with vendors and patrons, and doing my produce shopping. In practice, I visited the downtown market more frequently (it was more convenient in terms of location and the times it was open) and did most of my produce shopping there. There was significant overlap between the vendors at the two markets, though the Tuesday market was larger. The clientele did differ, with the Saturday market being more homogenous in terms of race and class as far as I could tell from a casual visual assessment (though data collected by Sowing Change corroborates this). The Tuesday market had more visitors, and much more diverse visitors. In addition to the two farmers' markets, I shopped semi-regularly at the food co-op. While I often saw someone there I knew, the shopping experience was much more traditional and less social.

⁹⁴ This market has since moved to its own specifically designated space several blocks away.

⁹⁵ At the time of my research there were currently three incentive programs being offered. Prescription for Health had been in place for over five years; medical providers could write a "prescription" for fresh fruits and vegetables to qualified patients (i.e. those on food assistance and other welfare programs) redeemable for \$X/week/month at the farmers' market. A similar program, fun through WIC, called ProjectFRESH, offered \$20/month vouchers to mothers for use at the farmers' markets. The other incentive program, Double Up Food Bucks, had moved to a statewide pilot (after being tested in a handful of markets). This program, sponsored by a range of organizations but managed by the Fair Food Network, doubled up to \$20 dollars in tokens for EBT users to spend at the farmers' markets. All these programs were billed as health-based, incentivizing and making more affordable fresh fruit and vegetable consumption among poor families. Research showed a relatively high redemption rate.

Elmwood County Food Policy Council

Just prior to my arrival in the fieldsite, funding acquired through a grant to the county department of public health made possible the formation of a county-wide food policy council. Still in the beginning stages of forming working groups and policy platforms, it was an ideal opportunity to observe how leaders of the alternative agrifood community in Elmwood sought to represent themselves and their city, and to relate to practitioners from across the county to form a common agenda. I attended several meetings of both the general body and the zoning and planning working group as an observer, as well as read through minutes, working papers, and documentation. These meetings do not feature in the ethnography that follows, but did play a role in formulating my analyses about environmental gentrification in Chapter 6. They also revealed the degree to which the Elmwood alternative agrifood community is isolated from other groups, in neighboring cities and countywide, an isolation that was easily identified as due to class- and race-based distinctions. Elmwood was routinely positioned in policy council discourse as where service, rather than consumption, based programs were needed, and where economic development, rather than environmental, priorities should be focused. For example, recommendations regarding a kitchen incubator suggested that residents of the east side of the county (Elmwood) were in greater need of the jobs and economic development opportunities such a project represented, while residents on the western side of the county were positioned as the potential customers for these enterprises.

The Cooperative Orchard and Garden Project (COGP)

I also participated in two different collective alternative agrifood endeavors—the Cooperative Orchard and Garden Project (COGP) and the Honeybee Initiative. Anna, a white, middle class woman, environmentalist, and gardener in Elmwood, was a member of both. My longstanding friendship with her provided much of the entree to these organizations. While information on

their activities is publicly available and ostensibly open to all, much of the membership and work is organized through shared social networks, making entree for newcomers difficult.

COGP exemplifies this dynamic. The orchard was founded in 2009 when a group of friends and colleagues in the alternative agrifood community of Elmwood joined together to collectively purchase a vacant property on Lincoln Street, in the Williams-Bell neighborhood. While initially envisioned as a community gardening space, the site later became a permaculture orchard, with various native fruit trees, shrubs, and an herb circle, along with a patch reserved for a neighbor's vegetable garden. The site is maintained by volunteer labor (though for a time a high school student and resident of the neighborhood interested in gardening and farming was paid to mow the site), organized year-round through a Facebook page and shared Google documents. Owners of the site and supporters of COGP gather every month or two to mow, weed, and tend the herbs. During the winter the sidewalks are shoveled as necessary via rotation between volunteers, and at least one annual meeting is held among shareholders to conduct business and plan the next year. At such an early stage, little fruit was being produced, and what was harvested was shared amongst members. I participated in COGP as a volunteer, attending several large workdays, as well as visiting the site on my own and with Anna to do a little maintenance. COGP is not well-known outside of the alternative agrifood community in Elmwood, and it is not clear that residents of the Williams-Bell, beyond the immediate neighbors with whom members try to maintain semi-regular contact, are aware of what it is.

The Honeybee Initiative

The Honeybee Initiative is also a cooperative project; this one aimed at beekeeping. Sponsored by the local food co-op, the Honeybee Initiative manages three honeybee hives located throughout the city, and helps to mentor backyard beekeepers. The cooperative hives are on the property of various community organizations (the food co-op, Sowing Change, and the hospital) and maintained through volunteer labor by Honeybee Initiative members. The backyard beekeeping

program allows Elmwood residents to work with a Honeybee Initiative beekeeper for a fee (or occasionally barter) to help them set up and manage their hive for the first one-to-two years. The goals of the project are two-fold. First, the Honeybee Initiative works to train beekeepers through its programs. No formal training is offered; rather, interested parties volunteer for the Honeybee Initiative with the understanding that they will learn beekeeping by doing it. Each of the three cooperative hives has an experienced beekeeper who oversees its care and is responsible for organizing volunteers (done through a shared Google Calendar). New “beeks” attend the workdays, observe hive maintenance, and get the chance to try it out themselves. As they gain skills they eventually are able to do hive checks on their own and go on to have their own personal hives or oversee one of the cooperatives.

The second goal of the Honeybee Initiative is education. The hives are located in public places, attempting to make honeybees visible in the urban landscape. Visibility is also engendered through pollinator friendly habitats, which beeks are active in creating and maintaining at their homes and in public places like roadway medians and community gardens. At the co-op, farmers’ markets, and other community events, literature from the Honeybee Initiative is available, and members are often on-hand to explain the threats facing honeybee populations in the US, primarily Colony Collapse Disorder and neonicotinoid use, and promote planting native, pollinator friendly plant species. Honey from the cooperative hives is harvested and sold at the food co-op, with proceeds being used to fund Honeybee Initiative activities. I participated in the Honeybee Initiative as a volunteer, attending a hive check, visiting the other hives, attending an organizational meeting, and helping with the annual Honeybee Festival, co-sponsored by the Honeybee Initiative.

Permaculture Everything! (PE!)

Finally, I participated semi-regularly in Elmwood’s permaculture meet-up group, Permaculture Everything! (PE!). The organization consists of three avenues for participation. One is a monthly

meeting, where a different educational topic is covered (e.g. foraging or intersection repair), led by a member of the group with interest or expertise. These meetings also included time for socialization and group discussion. I attended these meetings semi-regularly, and found them personally educational and particularly interesting from a research standpoint as discussion often focused on how to diversify participation in PE!, particularly among those marginalized groups who they perceived would benefit from their non-market livelihood strategies, and how to devote adequate time to engaging in ways of living that “created abundance” while necessarily being tied to capitalist economies.

The second means of participation consisted of a series of guilds. These guilds were organized around interests and skills, such as cooking and preserving food, and members organized amongst themselves various hands-on learning and collective work activities, for example, an educational work party on making nut oils. I did not regularly participate in any guilds, though I did attend a few guild activities, such as how to make a worm bin (a project I successfully completed and reported on for the monthly educational meeting; I am happy to say that my worms continue to thrive and digest my food waste).

Finally, in an effort to make permaculture principles of community, cooperative work, closed loop systems, and abundance all the more tangible, members of the group created and managed a large plot of land at a rural substance abuse residential rehab facility. The facility owns several agricultural fields that it leases out to local farmers. Working closely with the facility’s management, who were sympathetic to the paired environmental and social priorities of permaculture, PE! arranged for use of one of the fields. Through organized work parties of volunteer labor the field was converted into on-contour plantings of various fruit and nut trees,

alternated with cover crop plantings and swales.⁹⁶ I participated in one such workday, observing this social and ecological experiment in action.

PE! had perhaps the least diverse participation of any alternative food organization in Elmwood, but the most radical agenda and least amount of cliquishness. Its wide-ranging goals and diffuse organization offered many different people many different ways to engage, and membership in the organization was not easily ascertained, with several core groups and offshoots organizing amongst themselves as part of the permaculture umbrella. While differences in focus and organization, as well as several very significant personal conflicts, characterized these groups, there was also significant overlap and I treat them for the most part (unless otherwise specified) as one rather disparate group.

⁹⁶ Rather than planting straight rows, as is common agricultural practice, on-contour planting follows the natural contours of the land. On-contour rows are alternated with swales, shallow ditches that help collect and drain water.

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Education

BA Kenyon College (2007). Anthropology.

Academic Positions

Teaching Assistant, University of Kentucky, Department of Anthropology

2012 Cultural Diversity in the Modern World. Supervisor: Dr. Renee Bonzani.

2012 Global Dreams and Local Realities (Online). Supervisor: Dr. Sarah Lyon.

Academic Awards and Honors

2014 Dissertation Research Fellowship, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

2014 Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant, National Science Foundation - Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences.

2014 Dissertation Enhancement Award, Graduate School, University of Kentucky.

2011 Susan Abbott-Jamieson Award, Department of Anthropology, University of Kentucky.

2009–2012 Multi-Year Fellowship, Graduate School, University of Kentucky: a competitive award providing three years of full funding, with stipend.

Academic Publications

Papers Presented

- 2016 American Anthropological Association, Annual Meetings. Minneapolis, MN. “‘To nurture something that nurtures you’: Narratives of care and desires for the future among community gardeners in Michigan.” November 16–20, 2016.
- 2016 American Ethnological Society, Annual Meeting. Washington, D.C. “‘You can see what you’ve done at the end of the day and it’s beautiful’: the search for reconnection in everyday lived environments through gardening and beekeeping.” March 31–April 2, 2016.
- 2015 Society for Economic Anthropology, Annual Meeting. Lexington, KY. “Building a new economy with local food: Historical perspectives on the current use of urban gardening as economic redevelopment in Michigan.” April 9–11, 2015.
- 2015 Dimensions of Political Ecology, Annual Conference. Lexington, KY. “‘I care about the future of my city’: Urban gardening, social inequality, and building ‘green’ communities in deindustrial Michigan.” February 26–28, 2015.

- 2012 Ethnographic Praxis in Industry, Annual Conference. Savannah, GA. Masters and Doctoral Colloquium, "Re-Growing the Rust Belt: Vegetable Gardening, Place-making, and Alternative Economic Development in Southeast Michigan." October 13, 2012.
- 2012 Society for Applied Anthropology, Annual Meetings. Baltimore, MD. "Growing Difference: Identity and Urban Food Production in Southeast Michigan." March 28, 2012.
- 2011 American Anthropological Association, Annual Meetings. Montreal, QC, Canada. "Re-growing the Rust Belt: Urban Farming and Gardening as Community Development in Southeast Michigan." November 17, 2011.
- 2011 Dimensions of Political Ecology Conference. Lexington, KY. "Political Ecologies of Urban Agriculture: Gardens as Spaces of Production and Transgression." February 19, 2011.

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